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The Impact of a Freshman Academy on High School Transition

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The Impact of a Freshman Academy on High School Transition

By
Sherry Grier Veasey

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Sherry Grier Veasey under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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This is the end of one chapter in life for me and the beginning of a new one. It is my sincere desire and hope that I will extend the knowledge and experiences I have acquired on this journey to help promote a quest for knowledge in others as lifelong learners.

Abstract

The Impact of a Freshman Academy on High School Transition. Veasey, Sherry Grier, 2011: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, Student Achievement/Student Attendance/Adolescents/Potential Dropouts/Graduation

This dissertation was designed to identify and describe the impact a freshman academy has on high school transition for ninth-grade students at a rural high school in western North Carolina. This case study investigated the problems ninth graders encounter as they transition from middle school to high school. The study examined student achievement, student attendance, and the graduation rate in an effort to determine whether a freshman academy at the high school helped students transition successfully.

The transition to high school may be difficult for some students because of the countless changes they are experiencing as adolescents. The high school in this study was located in a rural western town in North Carolina and identified the ninth-grade class as the class with the most struggling students. In an effort to help students transition successfully to high school, a freshman academy was implemented.

This qualitative study consisted of interviews with the principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, and teachers in the freshman academy. Additional data was collected from high school principals in the district with freshman academies to determine strategies implemented for freshman academies in the school district. Focus group interviews were conducted with teachers in the academy. A central office person was also interviewed. A survey was conducted with teachers to ascertain their perceptions of the freshman academy since the implementation.

Interview data was collected, transcribed, analyzed, and reported in a narrative format according to themes and research questions. Survey data was collected, analyzed, and reported in a frequency table. Data from interviews, archival data, and the survey were triangulated to validate the findings for the study.

An analysis of the data revealed the freshman academy at the high school did not impact student achievement, student attendance, or the graduation rate. The data did reveal there was an impact on student motivation, students' attitudes toward school, and the school culture. Students participated in the learning process by interacting with their peers. Teachers used various instructional strategies including technology to help motivate students. Students enjoyed positive relationships with their teachers. School-wide expectations and teacher collaboration contributed to the culture of the school.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Nature of the Problem

The transition from eighth grade in middle school to ninth grade in high school may be difficult for many students. Students transitioning to high school from middle school are adolescents undergoing emotional, physical, social, and intellectual challenges (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Because these students are in transition in every aspect of their lives, the change or transition from middle school to high school presents yet another challenge for them.

In their research summary, the National Middle School Association (NMSA) (2006), citing Hertzog and Morgan (1998), the National Center for Education (NCES) (2002), and Roderick and Camburn (1999), noted the transition from middle school to high school has received more attention because of the increase in high school course failures and dropout rates. Further research indicated 30% of ninth graders fail to finish high school with their peers (Olson, 2006). In a report on preventing dropouts, Jerald (2007) maintained the transition years are critical gateways on the road to graduation. The report supported findings from research by Mizelle (1999) that concluded students are less likely to drop out of high school if they participate in programs that help them transition from middle school (Kaufman, Kwon, Klein, & Chapman, 2000).

As students transition into high school, Morton (2005), citing earlier research by Donohoe and Zigmond (1990), noted ninth graders experienced academic difficulties upon the transition to high school because, for the first time, students in the ninth grade must take and pass required courses for graduation. Lampert (2005) maintained students entering high school encounter more teachers and more academic pressures. Moving from middle school to high school, many students find there is change in the way they are expected to learn. As middle school students in the eighth grade, these students were

accustomed to interdisciplinary courses of study with the same group of teachers and a more cooperative learning approach than in high school (Pitts, 2005). Herlihy (2007) contended the focus of instruction changes in high school from teaching and nurturing the whole child to focusing on the content of academics.

In a 2003 study conducted by Letrello and Miles, two groups of ninth-grade students attending the same midwestern high school were interviewed regarding their perceptions of high school transition. One group of students included six students with learning disabilities and the other group included students without learning disabilities. Results from the interview revealed both groups of students indicated the most difficult aspects of moving to high school were getting used to the block schedule, high expectations of teachers, managing time, and lack of time for social activities.

Graber and Brooks-Gunn (1996) maintained not only is there a decrease in achievement as students transition from middle school to high school, there is an increase in behavior problems in the form of suspensions and expulsions. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's (2007) report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, during the 2006-2007 school year, ninth graders received 71,494 short-term suspensions in comparison with 34,614 short-term suspensions for 10th graders, 22,605 for 11th graders and 13,762 for 12th graders. Ninth graders received 1,590 long-term suspensions, the largest number in comparison to 660 for 10th graders, 450 for 11th graders and 239 for 12th graders (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007).

Transitioning from middle school to high school, students often experience a new social structure and dramatic change in their social status (Kerr, 2002a). Kerr (2002a) further maintained that "ninth graders go from being the oldest, most experienced

students in the middle school to the youngest, newest members of the high school population; thus negating their ‘top dog’ status” (p. 3), promoting feelings of anonymity and isolation. In her article *Back to school: Ninth grade proves to be a pivotal year for youths*, Chute (1999) reported that according to Hertzog and Morgan (1999), who conducted a study of the Allegheny School District in Pennsylvania, some students arrive at high school feeling scared because they are under pressure socially as well as academically.

Students transitioning to high school may encounter problems with attending school regularly (Mizelle, 2005). Mizelle (2005) stated that when students do not know where to turn for help, they feel stressed and their self-worth along with their grades may drop, causing students not to attend school regularly. Chute (1999) noted attendance as a factor in students’ successes during transition in the Allegheny County School District in Pennsylvania. She reported the lowest attendance recorded in any grade was in the ninth grade.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), a federal legislation, reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and focused much attention on the responsibility of school districts to help all children achieve at high levels. The underlying message in this act was to discourage schools from pushing out students who did not meet achievement goals (Olson, 2006). Two years prior to the NCLB Act (2001), in a speech to the National Press Club Luncheon citing *Breaking Ranks* by NASSP in September 1999, Richard Riley, Secretary of Education in the Clinton administration, called for high schools to create small supportive learning environments that give students a sense of connection (Riley, 1999). Riley (1999) advocated for schools-within-schools, academic houses, and an advisor for every high school student during the 4 years

of high school. Based on Riley's (1999) belief regarding education, there are two major transition years in a high school student's life. The first is the transition into high school and the second is the transition when a student graduates from high school. In that regard, according to Riley (1999), the transition for students moving from middle schools to high schools can be made smoother through freshman academies.

Chmelynski (2004), in an article to the National School Board Association, maintained that because ninth grade is hailed as a difficult year for students, an initiative that has gained support to ensure students transitioning to high school from middle school are successful, some districts across the nation are designing and implementing freshman academies. The academy concept, according to Riddle (n.d.), is a comprehensive program to ensure students are successful in a nurturing academic environment. Cook, Fowler, and Harris (2008) maintained freshman academies provide incoming ninth-grade students with additional resources and personalized support to overcome transitional obstacles. Hendrix (2007) noted while the arrangement of the academies may not be the same, they share some similarities. These similarities may include separate sections of a school designated only for ninth graders and their teachers.

Nationally, some schools and school districts have implemented freshman academies for students entering ninth grade in an attempt to ease the transition from middle school to high school. For example, in Kanawha County, West Virginia, school administrators at Capital High School began planning a freshman academy in the spring of 2004 in an effort to assist students with the transition from middle school to high school (Hughes, Copley, & Baker, 2005). The academy was implemented during the 2004-2005 school year. Teachers were selected from the current faculty and 70 students who scores ranged from the 35th to the 49th percentile were selected to participate. At

the end of the school year an evaluation was made to determine what effect, if any, participation in the academy had on students' attitudes, perceptions, and skills.

Researchers from Edvantia, a research laboratory, conducted the study. Findings from this study revealed students had a positive attitude and felt their teachers academically supported them.

In 2005 the staff of Moravia High School in Moravia, New York, implemented a freshman academy in order to ease the transition of middle school students to high school (Moravia Central School, 2008). The purpose of this academy was to support students and teachers to be academically, socially, and emotionally successful. The academy was housed in one building with a team of teachers. This gave teachers the flexibility to plan and conduct lessons that required extended time (Moravia Central School, 2008). Data after 1 year of implementation showed attendance improved .67% from 94.03% in 2004-2005 to 94.70% in 2005-2006. There was a reduction in discipline referrals from 620 in 2004-2005 to 501 in 2005-2006. The failure rate for ninth graders also declined 86% from 14% in 2002-2005 to 2% in 2005-2006.

North High School in Davenport, Iowa, implemented a ninth-grade academy in the 2006-2007 school year to serve students as they transitioned to high school (North High School, 2008). The academy consisted of all first-time ninth graders, an assistant principal, school counselor, and teams of teachers assigned to four core subject areas. These teachers shared common time during the school day. The academy was located in a separate section of the building in the main hallway. Data after implementation of the academy showed a reduction in discipline referrals of 25% and a reduction in class failures for the entire 2006-2007 school year of 8.9%.

Cook et al. (2008) noted from 2001-2007 that 134 ninth-grade academies in 63

counties were implemented throughout North Carolina. Researchers Cook et al. (2008) studied 82 of these academies. The premise for these academies was to provide support to ninth-grade students as they transition to high school in an effort to decrease nonpromotions and the dropout rate (Cook et al., 2008). Findings from this study indicated that from 2001-2007 there was a decrease in nonpromotion rates for schools with ninth-grade academies of 15% compared to a 22% state average and a significant change in the dropout rate of 6.6% in schools with ninth-grade academies compared to the state average of 12.5% (Cook et al., 2008).

Transition concerns are not just limited to students in the United States. In a New Zealand study, researchers Cox, Kennedy, Bishop, and Porteners (2004) conducted a semi-longitudinal study designed to gather information from students about their experiences as they transitioned from primary to secondary schools. There were four phases to the 18-month study. In phase one, interviews were conducted with 111 year 8 students. In phase two, interviews were conducted with 104 year 9 students and two groups of year 13 peer supporters. Phase three consisted of interviews with 101 year 9 students. In the fourth phase, 93 of the original 111 students were interviewed. In each phase, students were tested in reading, writing, and mathematics before and after transition using Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning Tests, a computer-based assessment package designed to check patterns of achievement. Results in achievement revealed that between phase one and phase two, average student achievement dropped in mathematics. There was no significant improvement in reading and no significant improvement in writing scores. Results between phase two and three showed average student achievement improved significantly in all subjects and results between phases three and four indicated significant improvement in reading only (Cox et al., 2004). The

study also revealed from student responses during phase one that 58% of the students had a positive attitude about school in year 8; however, in year 9, 43% of the students felt good about school.

The transition to high school is a critical stage in the lives of adolescents (Herlihy, 2007). According to Hertzog and Morgan (1997), moving from middle school to high school can be a very exciting time for students, yet the transition is filled with great anxiety and stress for many adolescents. In that regard, school districts across the country are implementing freshman academies to ease the stress and anxieties as students transition to high school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the freshman academy at one high school. This study specifically investigated the impact the freshman academy had on the transition to high school in the following areas:

1. The conditions that warranted a freshman academy.
2. The school system's role in addressing ninth-grade transition.
3. The design and operation of the freshman academy.
4. Key contributors including motivation, attitude toward school, and school culture.

Statement of the Problem

The high school, located in rural western North Carolina, was targeted by the school district as one of six high schools in the district to implement a freshman academy. The school district identified the following problems over a 3-year period at the high school, as a rationale for implementing a freshman academy: (a) student performance, (b) student attendance, and (c) graduation. The graduation rate at the high school was 64%,

compared to the state average of 69%. Student achievement on the state's ABC end-of-course tests showed 24% of the students in English I and 33% of the students in algebra I scored below grade level and lower than other students in the state.

Significance of the Problem

Freshmen will need to acquire more skills to compete in the 21st Century workplace. As such, it is important for students to be successful upon entering the ninth grade. Ninth grade is a critical year and some students are not ready for the challenges they will face academically and socially as they transition from middle school to high school (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). The ninth-grade year is critical in terms of providing the foundation for a student's high school career (Clark, 2007). If students have problems transitioning to high school, the outcome for students may be negative (Ruiz, 2005).

In general, according to Kerr (2002b), there is a decline in student achievement following a school transition. Roderick and Camburn (1999) revealed course failure for students making the transition to high school was not limited to students with low academic skills; however, the threat of course failure was an issue for ninth graders of all achievement levels. Furthermore, Roderick and Camburn (1999) indicated that in addition to the decline in achievement, there is a decline in attendance and an increased feeling of being isolated and anonymous when students enter high school. Students who fail to be successful in the ninth grade may fail to graduate. Queen (2002) maintained that "students who drop out of school experience lifelong difficulties. Among these difficulties are disenfranchisement from society, poor mental health, a greater likelihood of entering low-paying jobs, and unemployment" (p. 11). Failing to get a high school diploma not only affects the individual; the consequences of students dropping out of

high school are substantial to the national and global economic community (Queen, 2002).

The result of students not being successful as they transition to high school warrants attention for studying high school transitions. Further warranted with the increase of schools implementing freshman or ninth-grade academies is examining the impact freshman academies have on high school transition.

Research Questions

In order to address the problem, the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. What were the conditions that warrant a freshman academy?
2. What was the school system doing to address ninth-grade transition?
3. Was the freshman academy being operated as designed?
4. What was the impact of the freshman academy on the key contributors

including motivation, attitude toward school, and school culture?

Delimitations of the Study

This study was a case study examining one of the high schools in a district in North Carolina. The study data was comprised of data from the administrators and teachers of the school.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to schools with ninth-grade or freshman academies. The study was limited to student data for students who were in the ninth grade for the first time and were enrolled in end-of-course (EOC) classes. The study was further limited to the perceptions of teachers of ninth-grade or freshman academies.

Definition of Terms

Several terms will be used in the study and need additional clarification. The definitions listed below are significant to understand the research study and its implications. The terms freshman academy and ninth-grade academy will be used interchangeably.

Adolescence. A period of time between childhood and adulthood.

Attendance. The actual presence of the student during the school day defined by laws and rules of a State Board of Education.

Core classes. Core classes are English, math, science, and social studies.

Discipline referral. Any action taken by a student leading to in-school or out-of-school suspension.

Dropout. A student who enters high school as a ninth grader and does not graduate with a high school diploma or its equivalent.

End-of-course tests. State mandated tests taken after completing class work at the end of the semester or at the end of the school year.

Failing grade. Any grade average obtained during a grading period equal to or less than 69.

Freshman academy. The organizational structure of ninth grade located in a separate place or specific area of a school with a team of teachers sharing a common area.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. Proposed by President Bush shortly after his inauguration, NCLB was signed into law on January 8, 2002. NCLB was built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for

parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research (NCLB, 2001).

Inclusion classes. Classes that allow students with special needs the opportunity to spend most of their time with nondisabled students in a regular education class.

Retention. A term applied when a student has not successfully obtained the necessary credits for promotion to a higher grade level.

Shared core scheduling. A group of students have the same schedule for core classes.

Teaming. Teachers from each of the core classes share the same students.

Transition. The movement of students into high school and out of middle school.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of some of the challenges many, but not all, students face as they transition to high school. Compounded with the changes brought on with adolescence, students must cope with the changes they face in a new school environment. The goal of this chapter was to highlight the basis for concerns of high school transition as related to student achievement, student attendance, and student behaviors. The intent of the chapter was to give information relative to how the implementation of freshman academies or ninth-grade academies addresses those concerns.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The high school, located in the rural western piedmont of North Carolina was targeted by the school district as one of six high schools in the district to implement a freshman academy. The school district identified the following problems over a 3-year period at the high school as a rationale for implementing a freshman academy: (a) student achievement, (b) attendance, and (c) graduation rates. The graduation rate at the high school was 64% compared to the state average of 69%. Student achievement on the state's ABC end-of-course tests showed 24% of the students in English I scored below grade level. The scores further revealed 33% of the students in algebra I scored below grade level. These scores were lower than other students in the state. In an effort to address these concerns, the school was directed to implement a freshman academy during the 2005-2006 school year.

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature that is pertinent to the transition of students from middle school to high school. The chapter begins with an historical background of schools as it relates to the ninth grade. Next, the literature focuses on the impact, if any, freshman academies have on achievement, attendance behaviors, and key contributors, including motivation, attitude toward school, and school culture as students transition into high school. The literature also notes implications for reducing dropout rates. This review discusses major findings and implications of freshman academies in schools that have implemented freshman academies. In understanding the premise of freshman academies and transition, it is important to be familiar with what is happening to students during transition. Therefore, literature regarding adolescent development is presented, in addition to research regarding transition to high school.

Historical Background

Prior to 1948, one teacher served the majority of schools in the United States enrolling 30 students in elementary grades (McFarland, 2007). Elementary education was believed to be sufficient to be gainfully employed at that time. High schools were not considered relevant because many students left school to enter the workforce to support their families (Torres, 2004). However, in locations where high schools were operating, Grades 1 through 12 were located in one building (McFarland, 2007).

As the United States shifted from agrarian to industrial and commercial, the future of education was debated (McFarland, 2007). In the early 1900s, education reformers, in an effort to provide more and better resources for students, advocated for large schools in central locations (McFarland, 2007). The school organizational structure included the elementary configuration of Grades K-8 and the high school configuration of Grades 9-12 (Bourdeaux, 2002).

At the turn of the 20th Century, many educators held two fundamental beliefs: Many schools were to provide opportunities for every child to be educated from kindergarten to college, and those students who did not attend college should have a different education (McFarland, 2007). In response to those beliefs, and to prevent students from dropping out of school, junior high schools were designed. The configuration for junior high schools included seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. Reformers believed the junior high school would meet the needs of adolescents and prevent students from dropping out of school because a new curriculum was formed introducing new subjects (McFarland, 2007). According to Morton (2005), critics of the junior high school did not believe this configuration met the needs of adolescents. In that regard, a reorganization of grades to meet the needs of adolescents, the middle school

movement, began. As a result of this reorganization, the grade configuration for the middle schools included sixth, seventh, and eighth grades (Morton, 2005). In most schools in the United States, ninth grade marks the first year of high school (Bordeaux, 2002). Sikes (2002) maintained when ninth-grade students moved into high schools, the educational environment in high schools did not meet the developmental needs of these adolescents. As a result, freshman academies are the most recent reform efforts to assist students in the transition from middle school to high school.

Adolescent Development

Adolescence can be a confusing time for students due to the many physical changes that occur in the human body (Johnstone, 2001). It is a time of perpetual physical, social, emotional, and cognitive changes. The onset of adolescence is as unique as the process, generally occurring between the ages of 12 and 19. Adolescent development can be divided into three stages: early adolescence (12-14 years), middle adolescence (14-17 years), and late adolescence (17-19 years) (South Carolina Department of Mental Health, 2007). For this study, the term adolescence was used to denote the changes experienced by ninth graders. Students generally end their middle school years and begin high school at age 14, in the ninth grade; thus, they are between early and middle adolescence. As students matriculate into high school as ninth graders, perhaps the most visible change they experience is how they look physically. Physically, these youngsters experience significant increases in height, weight, and internal organ size as well as changes in skeletal and muscular systems (NMSA, 2007). Adolescence is a time of rapid growth and development (NMSA, 2007). With that growth and development is a change in the basal metabolism (NMSA, 2007). Because of the change in metabolism, adolescents oftentimes have periods of restlessness and an insatiable

desire for food (NMSA, 2007). They are often not able to stay healthy because of poor physical health habits and high-risk behaviors including the use of alcohol or illicit drugs (NMSA, 2007) and experimentation with sexual activity. According to research done by the National Middle School Association (2007), the physical development of adolescents may affect their psychological and social development. As students progress through adolescence, the physical changes they experience may cause them to be more conscious of themselves. Adolescents are inclined to feel strange and uncomfortable about their own bodies.

Adolescence is also a time when young people change socially and emotionally. They tend to become self-absorbed and worry about what others think of them. As a part of their social and emotional development, they struggle with their sense of identity. It is at this time in their development that they seek to gain independence from their parents and seek more acceptances from their peers. There is a need for adolescents to belong to a group, with peer approval becoming more important and adult approval becoming less important (NMSA, 2007). This need often results in more allegiance to peer groups (NMSA, 2007). Accordingly, as young adolescents mature socially, they often experience conflict with their peers and family (NMSA, 2007). It is during this time that adolescents may exhibit inconsistent behaviors and imitate other peers or adults while choosing to make their own decisions. Adolescent behavior at this stage can seem rebellious to parents and adults. While these young people will test the limits and sometimes defy adult authority, they still depend on the adults in their lives. The premise that social maturity develops later than physical and cognitive development may explain why adolescents overreact to social situations, ridicule others, and feel embarrassment (NMSA, 2007). According to Queen (2002), during adolescence peer influences may

possibly cause some students to place less importance on education. Queen (2002) further maintained:

Sometimes peers may influence them (students) to develop a negative attitude towards school because they lack an understanding of the information being taught in the school setting. Because students lack an understanding of the skills being taught, they are usually faced with embarrassment and ridicule. They withdraw from the school setting in order to avoid the cruel acts. (p. 40)

The period of adolescence brings about changes in the lives of students cognitively (NMSA, 2007). Prior to adolescence, according to the theory of Piaget, students are capable of logical thinking; however, their imaginations are constrained by reality and they perform logical operations on concrete objects (NMSA, 2007). During adolescence, abstract thinking develops (NMSA, 2007). It is during this period that adolescents begin to think about the future, set goals, engage in more mature decision making, as well as become more insightful (NMSA, 2007). Along with these new reasoning skills, adolescents tend to become more argumentative and question adult authority (NMSA, 2007).

Student Motivation

The period of adolescence is a critical time in the lives of youngsters as they make the transition to high school. Motivation can hinder academic success during the transition from middle school to high school (Caldwell, 2007). Ragland (2008) noted motivation as one of the most important reasons for poor student achievement. He further expressed certain teaching and administrative practices, along with the school's atmosphere, could contribute to motivation problems. Worley (2007) defined student motivation as "a desire to engage in the learning process" (p. 46). She further noted

students are motivated either extrinsically, stemming from rewards or the need to stay away from negative consequences, or intrinsically, stemming from satisfaction of an accomplishment from learning. In her research, Worley (2007) surveyed 242 students to determine the relationship between academic achievement and at-risk students relative to grade point averages (GPAs), with motivation being an independent variable for at-risk students. Of the 242 students surveyed, 238 responded. There were six GPA categories in this study. The majority of the students (GPA greater than 2.5) responded that they were self-motivated and worked hard in school. However, students with GPAs less than 1.5 did not believe they challenged themselves in school. Of the students who had GPAs over 3.5, 82.8% were involved in extracurricular activities; 49% of students with GPAs of at least 2.5 and less than 3.5 indicated participation in extracurricular activities; while only 27.3% of students with GPAs of less than 1.5 participated in extracurricular activities. Approximately 82% of the students with a GPA less than 1.5 expressed the desire to attend college. The researcher found the motivation variable was the strongest predictor of GPAs in at-risk students.

In earlier research, Otis, Grouzet, and Pelletier (2005) examined intrinsic and extrinsic motivation during the transition from junior to senior high school and changes on educational outcomes. The researchers surveyed 646 students in eighth, ninth, and tenth grades using the true intra individual change modeling technique by Steyer, Partchev, and Shanahan (2000). Results revealed that a student's intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation decreased slowly from eighth to tenth grade.

Student Attitudes toward School

Students' attitudes toward school can prove to be a factor for success. Sankofa, Hurley, Allen, and Boykin (2005) found in general that some students' academic

difficulties are related to their attitudes toward education. In a mixed-methods study, Letrello (2002) investigated student attitudes toward school as they transitioned from eighth grade to ninth grade. The study included eighth-grade students and was made up of two phases. In phase one, students were interviewed in eighth grade and in phase two, the same students were interviewed as ninth graders. Results revealed that students were fearful of high school, especially the size of the school. Students were also fearful of older students, of not having enough friends, and of not being able to find all of their classes.

In a 2000 longitudinal study, Murdock, Anderman, and Hodge (2000) surveyed 240 seventh- and ninth-grade students to determine students' perceptions of their school environments influenced by teachers and peers. Ninth graders provided data on effort, value of education, and future academic plans. The researchers found students experiencing negative expectations from teachers and peers and negative relationships with teachers have difficulties with the transition from middle school to high school. According to Murdock et al. (2000), it is important for students to realize positive experiences with teachers and peers in order to avoid alienation and negative self-perceptions.

School Culture

The transition from middle school to high school introduces ninth-grade students to a new school culture with different expectations (Cooper & Liou, 2007). Culture is defined as the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the character of the school (Peterson, 2002). In schools, there are certain expectations and behaviors communicated to students by teachers (Smith, 2007). These expectations and behaviors represent the norms (Smith, 2007). Smith (2007)

further maintained values and beliefs are expressed in the way teachers view themselves as part of the school, the district, and the community. Symbols, according to Smith (2007), are found in the common practices that are expected and accepted by members of the organization. These symbols include displaying students' work or posting family concerns in the teachers' lounge. Rituals and ceremonies, such as distributing report cards, are a part of the expectations of the school. In their study, Pritchard, Morrow, and Marshall (2005) contended that a positive educational culture consists of (a) respect and trust in teachers and students, (b) a sense of belongingness to the school, (c) a collaborative learning and working environment, and (d) support for student adult learning, specifically continuing professional development. Their study examined the relationship between the district's culture, the school's culture, and students' attitudes about their school.

In an attempt to enhance student motivation, student attitudes, and positive cultural experiences in high school, some school districts are implementing intervention programs. One such program is Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). According to Hale (2006), AVID has provided students with the tools they need to be academically successful. In a 2006 cross-sectional descriptive and comparative study, Hale examined 25 ninth-grade students in regular classes, 25 ninth-grade students in the AVID Program, 23 twelfth-grade students in regular classes, and 23 twelfth-grade students in the AVID Program to determine their motivational and related attitudes and beliefs concerning their experiences in high school. The 12th-grade students had participated in the AVID Program in Grades 9, 10, and 11. Using surveys, Hale (2006) specifically examined students' self-esteems, self-efficacies, personal beliefs, perceived social supports, levels of acculturation, and demographics. Results from this study

revealed that regardless of grade level, AVID aided in successful student outcomes. Specifically, according to Hale (2006), students reported they were more confident in their classes; they earned better grades, had positive self-concepts, and had positive perceptions regarding their “cultural/environment fit” (p. 70).

Student Transition to High School

Most students attending public school today will experience several forms of transitions, or the process of moving from one level of schooling to another. Each year, thousands of young adolescents make the crucial transition from middle school into high school (Mizelle, 2005). Achieving a smooth transition can be difficult when considering the individuals involved. Schiller (1999) defined academic transition as “a process during which institutional and social factors influence which students’ educational careers are positively or negatively affected by this movement between organizations” (pp. 216-217). This process supports Hertzog and Morgan’s (1999) notion that transition is not an event, but an extended period of time that influences students’ attitudes and behaviors across two organizations. In that regard, the success or failure during transition from middle school to high school can be the turning point in the academic and social lives of adolescents. As students transition to high school, they will not only experience the developmental changes, but most students will also experience a change in the physical environment of their school. Ninth-grade students may have problems adjusting because of the size of the school. Large high schools may offer a less personal environment, making it easier for students to become anonymous, socially withdrawn, and academically disengaged, which may further exacerbate a smooth transition from middle to high school (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2001).

In their mixed-method study, Cooper and Markoe-Hayes (2005) surveyed 150

ninth graders and their families who participated in the UCLA 2003 EASE Project Summer Bridge Program. The program is a residential program for ninth-grade students and a joint partnership between the UCLA EASE Project, The Dream Foundation, and the educators at Valley High School in Sacramento, California, to identify potential students for college (Cooper & Markoe-Hayes, 2005). The qualitative data consisted of focus group interviews; quantitative data were collected through student surveys using a 45-minute, 85-item self-reported instrument assessing the influences and importance of five spheres of influence (family, peer networks and school structures, policies, practices, and culture) on students' attitudes and experiences during their transitional year in high school. While 80% of the students in the study were excited, hopeful, and sure of themselves, students reported that the large physical layout of the school, fears of getting lost, as well as the increased number of students on campus created fear and trepidation.

Smith, Feldwisch, and Abell (2006) examined the similarities and differences between students' and parents' perceptions prior to the transition to high school. In their study of a large public high school in the midwest, student participants transitioned from one of the three middle schools to a large high school with more than 3,000 students. Their study included 40 students at the end of eighth grade along with their parents. The students were surveyed using the *Perceptions of Transition Survey* adapted from Akos and Galassi (2004) measuring students' feelings about academic, social, and organizational aspects of high school. The survey consisted of 35 items prompting students to reflect on their transition to high school. Data analysis from the survey revealed students were concerned about getting lost and finding their way around.

Johnstone (2001) investigated rural Australian student experiences of the transition to high school. Interviews, questionnaires, and student journals were used to

collect data during the last 5 weeks of primary school and during the first three terms of year 7 in high school. Results indicated students had many anxieties related to the physical environment of high school.

Student Achievement

In addition to the physical layout of high schools, the first year of high school presents new academic demands on students. Many students find the journey from the middle grades to high school difficult. They lack the knowledge and skills necessary for doing high school-level work, and they do not have the study skills needed to meet higher standards in ninth grade and beyond (High Schools That Work, 2002). Grading practices, instructional presentations, and departmentalization differ at the high school level (Queen, 2002). There is a dramatic change in the school learning environment. Kerr (2002a), as cited in Morton (2005), maintained that students “face for the first time the ‘credits earned’ promotion system. No longer can they just be promoted from grade to grade as they were in elementary and middle school” (p. 1).

In his ex post facto study, Alspaugh (1998) compared three groups of 16 school districts to investigate the nature of achievement loss associated with the transition to middle schools and the transition to high school. Findings revealed students in school districts with transitions at Grade 6 and Grade 9 experienced a greater achievement loss than students making the transition from a K-8 elementary school. The experience of a previous transition did not prevent the achievement loss during the transition to high school. Alspaugh’s (1998) findings supported earlier studies of Seidman, Allen, Abner, Mitchell, and Feinman (1994) regarding achievement loss of students in transition.

Researchers in Pennsylvania (Neild & Weiss, 1999) conducted the Philadelphia Educational Longitudinal Study (PELS) of more than 400 high schools and their feeder

middle schools on the transition to ninth grade. The study highlighted the high school choice process, ninth-grade course failure, and responses by parents during the transition to high school. PELS tracked public school students from the summer after eighth grade through their senior year. The school district and self-reports from parents and students were used for data collection. Results of the study indicated a drop in grades, mainly in the neighborhood schools.

Midgley and Maher (2002) completed a 5-year longitudinal study with 800 students as they transitioned from sixth grade and to ninth grade. The researchers collected survey data from students at eight different intervals as they moved from sixth grade in middle school to ninth grade in high school. Findings revealed grade point averages (GPA) dropped a letter grade. Students' grades declined from above average to average as students transitioned through middle school and into high school (Midgley & Maher, 2002).

Akos and Galassi (2004) conducted a study with 320 ninth-grade students in a single high school. Students were surveyed based on previous transition research by Akos (2002), local transitioning programming, and stakeholder feedback. Using a checklist format, students were asked what things they looked forward to and what concerned them about moving from middle school to high school. Students were also given open-ended, short answer questions to determine what could be done to help ninth graders with their move from middle school to high school. Results showed that the most difficult aspects of transition were the social organizational changes, and the academic work.

Reviews of international literature on transition support the notion of decline in student achievement. In their report to the Ministry of Education, McGee, Ward,

Gibbons, and Harlow (2003) reported that following transitions to secondary schools, students tend to suffer decreases in academic achievement. They attributed the decrease to students' lack of interest in academic activities, but an increase in non-academic activities associated with the middle years.

Sirsch (2003) investigated 856 students in transition in Australia. A questionnaire was used to ascertain information from students regarding academic achievement. Results revealed students perceived academics as a challenge upon transitioning to secondary school.

Student Attendance

During the time of transition, ninth graders move from the nurturing environment of middle school to an environment of diverse and conflicting social and academic pressures where they are expected to make independent decisions (Queen, 2002). In light of the conflicting social and academic pressures, attendance may be another concern for students transitioning from middle school to high school. Neild and Balfanz (2001) contended that one of the indications for predicting ninth-grade failure or success is the student's attendance rate in the first 30 days of ninth grade. In their 2001 paper, *An Extreme Degree of Difficulty: The Educational Demographics of Urban Neighborhood High Schools*, Neild and Balfanz presented attendance data from Philadelphia's high schools. The data indicated that at six of the 22 high schools, more than 25% of the students were absent 10 or more days in the first 30 days of school. Forty-one percent of first-time ninth graders missed 10 or more days of school with the most serious attendance problems. In addition, more than 15% of the ninth graders at eight other schools missed 10 or more days.

Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, and Smith (2000) conducted a study

involving 22 African-American eighth-grade students in the Young Scholars Program (YSP) of Ohio State University. The purpose of the study was designed to identify factors that contribute to the success of African-American students making the transition to high school. Participants were interviewed and case narratives were kept on each student. The researchers found the participants perceived teachers in high school expected students to be more mature and responsible and needing less monitoring of schoolwork. In a subsequent study, students noted high school was more difficult than eighth grade and that some of the teachers were unapproachable, too busy, and belittling (Newman et al., 2000). The perception of some students was that teachers did not care about them at all. In that regard, students may become disengaged and withdrawn, decreasing motivation and attendance. Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, and Splittgerber (2000) maintained, “the failure of students to negotiate systematic transitions may initiate the gradual disengagement process from school and promote conflict between the youth and the school as an institution” (p. 329).

Isackson and Jarvis (1999) conducted a short-term longitudinal study assessing adolescents’ changes during the transition to high school. Surveys were administered once during the eighth-grade year and two times during the ninth-grade year. Isackson and Jarvis (1999) surveyed 41 students with a median age of 13.7. Each student’s GPA and attendance from the eighth-grade year was compared to the GPA and attendance from both the first and second semesters of their first year of high school. Using the Psychological Sense School Membership scale (PSSM) cited in Goodenow (1993), school membership was measured. Results of the study revealed a decline in grade point average once students transitioned into high school. In their study, Isackson and Jarvis (1999) found that in addition to a decline in grade point averages, there was also a decline

in attendance rates through the ninth-grade year. This study supported an earlier study as cited in Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, and Trickett (1991), noting significant decreases in attendance rates during school transitions. Torres (2004) maintained, “it is during this time of dealing with the ever-changing pressures, that the disengagement of adolescents in learning begins, and the rates of absenteeism, poor academic achievement, retention and dropping out begin to rise” (pp. 35-36). In a 2006 survey of young people who identified themselves as high school dropouts from 25 different locations throughout the United States, 47% reported being bored or disengaged from high school while 38% reported too much freedom and not enough rules; consequently, it is easy for ninth graders to get lost in the shuffle, skip school without consequence, or quietly fail without any concerted intervention by the school (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006).

Student Behavior and Discipline

The transition to high school may affect student discipline and behavior. In a 2002 study by Simpson, 50 tenth-grade students in a suburban school district were surveyed regarding their transition to high school. He found 25% of the students surveyed received more referrals in ninth grade than they received in the eighth grade. In addition, 36% of the respondents reported they had more disciplinary problems in hallways in ninth grade than in eighth grade.

Cadwallader, Farmer, and Cairns (2003) conducted a Carolina Longitudinal Study in an effort to measure the stability and susceptibility of students’ at-risk behavioral statuses during the transition to high school. Participants for the study consisted of 80 students in two groups between the ages of 13 and 20 to determine social cognition and interactions. One group of 40 students was identified as at-risk for aggressive behavior and antisocial conduct. Another group of 40 non-at-risk students was identified as a

control group. Two measures, the social cognitive interview (SCI) and the social interaction scale, were used to identify and determine stability and susceptibility during transition. Results revealed that regardless of the risk status, students experienced increased problems in social adjustment during the transition to high school.

Queen (2002) posited that during the transition process students with behavioral problems continually disturb class and are frequently in confrontations with other students or the teacher. He further maintained, “These students have an extremely difficult time adjusting to any school environment and most will become serious discipline problems” (Queen, 2002, p. 3).

Implications for Reducing Dropout Rates

High school graduation rates have gained increasing prominence as a key issue for educators as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Hendrix, 2007). Ninth grade is a pivotal year in the education pipeline for students (Black, 2004). While there is no single reason that students drop out, declines in achievement, attendance, participation and behavior along with the stressors of adolescence, all add to the retention and risk of dropping out as students enter ninth grade (Black, 2004; Case, 2006; Chute, 1999). Failing to graduate or dropping out of high school is a cumulative process over a period of time and manifests itself in predictable behaviors, such as increased disengagement and declining motivation during the period of transition to high school (Chmelynski, 2004; Neild et al., 2001). Research studies on transition have indicated strategies that create a more supportive environment can help reduce dropout rates.

In her study, Torres (2004) investigated the effects of a ninth-grade transition program aimed at keeping students in school and on track for graduation for three groups of ninth graders. In a comparative study of first-time ninth graders in a ninth-grade

academy with ninth graders from the same school who did not participate in a ninth-grade academy, Torres (2004) evaluated the achievement, attendance, and promotion rate of the first-time ninth graders. Participants for the study were comprised of three different groups of ninth-grade students from three different school years in the same district. The comparison group was made up of 537 ninth graders before implementing the ninth-grade academy. The first experimental group consisted of 432 students enrolled during the first year of the academy, and the second experimental group was made up of 502 students in the ninth grade but not in the academy. Findings showed attendance for the students who participated in the ninth-grade academy was significantly higher than for students who were not in the ninth-grade academy.

Similarly, in a quasi-experimental study, Pitts (2005), using a mixed-methods design, examined the influence of a ninth-grade transition program for at-risk students in an affluent public suburban school district in New Jersey. Students identified as at-risk in the eighth grade because of grades, attendance, and discipline referrals were selected and assigned to cohorts. Transition cohort 1 consisted of 20 students who participated in a summer freshman academy involving physical activity, study skills, a personal plan, and an assigned advocate. Transition cohort 2 consisted of 20 students with the option to begin the program after the first grading period. Students in cohort 2 who participated had a personal advocate and a weekly study skills class. Using *t*-tests, grades, days absent, and discipline referrals, the information was analyzed for the 2004-2005 school year. Findings from this research yielded significant improvements in grades and behavior in ninth grade for both cohorts. Cohort 1 students' grades were higher for three grading periods; fewer days were missed for one grading period; and discipline referrals were fewer for two marking periods as compared to cohort 2.

Capstick (2007) studied 438 ninth-grade students from a large suburban school district focusing on the effectiveness of a ninth-grade transition program and its impact on academic achievement, attendance, and school engagement. Using a quasi-experimental pre and posttest with no control group design and a correlation matrix design, findings suggested that a transition program may have been adequate to prevent a greater decline in school engagement.

Implications from these studies revealed attendance, promotion, and school engagement are key in preventing retention and students dropping out of school. Transition years are critical years on the road to graduation; consequently, programs that support ninth graders as they transition to high school may reduce the dropout rates.

Freshman Academy

One of the most critical transitions in school life is moving from the student centered, nurturing environment of the middle school to a less nurturing environment at the high school (Lee, 2003). The concerns about problems ninth graders encounter as they transition from middle to high school have caused school districts across the nation to look at ways to help students as they move from eighth grade to high school as ninth graders. A growing movement in this assistance is the development of freshman academies. The academy is intended to allow school stakeholders to provide a more nurturing, smaller environment for students moving out of the middle school (Clark, 2007). While freshman academies across the nation may be different, the concept is designed to specifically place ninth-grade students in a designated location of a high school building, thereby isolating ninth grade from the mainstream population of the high school where the transition can be conducted gradually (Queen, 2002).

The Philadelphia school system initiated freshman academies in 1999 under the

umbrella of the Talent Development Initiative. The curriculum was designed for ninth graders to take four classes per semester; two classes of English, two classes of math, study skills, and comprehension classes. Students were divided among interdisciplinary teams of teachers. The students stayed together all day in classes 80 to 90 minutes long. Data from five of the high schools utilizing freshman academies showed an 80% increase in attendance, a 41% decrease in suspensions, and a 50% decrease in arrests. Researchers Neild and Weiss (1999) recommended from the study that ninth graders should be separate, supporting the implementation and organization of a freshman academy (Morrison, Neild, Spiridakis, & Useem, 2002).

Houston County High School in Georgia began a ninth-grade academy during the 1999-2000 school year. According to the principal at the time, Dr. Mike Hall, over 60% of the total discipline referrals were from ninth-grade students. The model used for the academy isolated all first-time ninth graders from the rest of the school during a six-period day with 55 minutes per class, thereby reducing discipline referrals and retentions, along with helping students successfully transition into high school. Students were given elective classes at the end of the day. The rationale of giving students choices of classes helped reduce discipline and behavior problems. Six years after the academy began, discipline referrals were reduced over 55% and the number of students failing ninth grade was cut by more than 40% (Hall, 2006).

In an effort to provide a smooth transition from middle school to high school, increase student achievement, and provide a support system for students entering high school, South Brunswick High School in Brunswick County, North Carolina, started a freshman academy in 2001-2002. After 2 years of implementation, results from two of the three end-of-course (EOC) classes showed significant gains. Gains were seen in

English I from 70.7% in the 2002 school year to 82.8% for the 2003 school year and in algebra I from 76.8% for the 2002 school year to 86% at the end of the 2003 school year. Ashley High School in New Hanover County, North Carolina, saw a decrease in the number of suspensions in ninth grade from 49% to 31% after implementing a freshman academy during the 2002-2003 school year (Edgecomb County Public Schools, 2004).

Summary of Literature

The literature reveals the transition to high school can be problematic for students and may be the factor that either keeps students engaged in their schooling or completely disengages them, leading to success or failure.

This chapter highlighted the need for a change in schooling with an historical overview of education practices in the United States, moving from the all-inclusive Grades 1 through 12 in one building to the junior high configuration, Grades 7, 8, and 9, to the present configuration of middle schools, Grades 6, 7, and 8, with ninth grade marking the beginning of high school. The literature supported freshman academies as the most recent reform effort to assist students as they transition to high school. The recent reform evolved because students were having difficulties moving from middle school to high school. The literature pointed to school districts in various parts of the country seeking ways to combat the difficulties ninth graders experience with the transition to high school including a larger environment, more teachers, and more classes.

It was noted through the literature review that adolescent development, student motivation, student attitudes, and the culture of the school could get in the way of successful transition to high school, thereby causing some students to drop out of school. Data from studies showed a decline in student achievement and student attendance for those students who had difficulty with high school transition. Studies revealed freshman

academies were used as a means to support students in transition from middle school to high school. The literature pointed to the success of students who were participants in freshman academies and other freshman activities during the first year of high school.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Transition to high school from middle school is receiving more attention due to the fact that ninth-grade course failures and high school dropout rates exceed all other grade levels (NMSA, 2006). The research literature has indicated that students may experience a decline in grades and attendance during the transition from middle school to high school. Further literature research has indicated increased incidences in expulsion and suspensions for students moving from middle school to high school (NMSA, 2006).

The high school, located in rural western North Carolina, was targeted by the school district as one of six high schools in the district to implement a freshman academy in the fall of 2004. The school district identified the following problems at the high school as a rationale for implementing a freshman academy: (a) student performance, (b) attendance, and (c) graduation rates. The graduation rate at the high school was 64% compared to the state average of 69%. Student achievement on the state's ABC end-of-course tests showed 24% of the students in English I and 33% of the students in algebra I scored below grade level and lower than other students in the state.

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the impact the freshman academy at the high school had on students as they transition to high school. Literature on school transitions denotes that the transition to high school can be problematic for students and may be the factor that either keeps students engaged in their schooling or completely disengages them, leading to success or failure. To that end, the questions guiding this study specifically focused on the variables of student achievement, student attendance, and student behaviors noting the impact those variables had on the freshman academy at the high school. This chapter will describe the design and research methods

the researcher used in the study including the setting and the participants. The researcher will cite data sources and include procedures for data collection and data analysis.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of the impact the freshman academy had at the high school. In order to ascertain answers relative to the impact the freshman academy had on ninth-grade students at the high school, the following questions were used:

1. What were the conditions that warrant a freshman academy?
2. What was the school system doing to address ninth-grade transition?
3. Was the freshman academy being operated as designed?
4. What was the impact of the freshman academy on the key contributors

including motivation, attitude toward school, and school culture?

Research Design

The study was primarily qualitative in design using a case study methodology. The case study method is used for research when the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The cases are bounded by time and activity and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2003). To support this premise, the researcher used multiple ways to gather data (survey results, interview with teachers, guidance counselor, principal, focus groups, central office personnel, and archival documents). In addition, Creswell (2003) maintained “qualitative research takes place in the natural setting” (p. 181). The participants involved in this study were studied in their natural setting.

Site Selection

The study included one high school. This high school was chosen because of the implementation of the freshman academy. As previously stated, the high school first implemented a freshman academy during the 2004-2005 school year. The participants for this study included the school principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, and teachers in the freshman academy at the high school. The researcher believed the selection of this particular site would add to the body of knowledge in regards to freshman academies. See Table 1 for demographics for the freshman academy.

Table 1

Demographics for the Freshman Academy

Demographic	<i>n</i>	%
Teachers	16	
Administrators	1	
Guidance counselor	1	
Students	302	
Gender		
Male	161	53.1
Female	142	46.9
Race		
African Americans	57	18.9
Hispanic	12	4.0
White	225	74.5
Asian	3	1.0
American Indian	1	0.3
Multiracial	4	1.3
Free/reduced lunch	193	64.0

Instruments

For the purpose of this study, the principal, assistant principal, teachers, and guidance counselor were interviewed. The researcher emailed the principal, teachers, and guidance counselor at the high school to invite their participation in the study. The researcher asked participants to be interviewed using the questions below. The purpose of these questions was to obtain information relative to the experiences of the principal, guidance counselor, and teachers of the freshman academy and to understand the rationale and process for implementation. The following themes were assigned to individual and groups of questions with the intent to address the research questions: implementation, classroom level changes, professional development, support structure, results, and evaluation. Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 addressed implementation; questions 11, 12, and 13 addressed classroom level changes; questions 9, 10, 14, and 15 addressed support structure; question 16 addressed results; question 8 addressed professional development; and question 6 addressed evaluation.

The following open-ended questions were used for the interview:

1. Describe for me what the high school was like prior to implementation of the freshman academy.
2. Describe those things that led up to the decision to implement the freshman academy at the high school.
3. Describe input from the district office regarding the implementation of the freshman academy.
4. Describe any difficulties or issues that arose during and since implementation.
5. Describe any ways that you tried to deal with any difficulties or issues that arose.

6. Describe how the goals of the freshman academy are measured.
7. Tell me about your experiences working with teachers during implementation.
8. Describe any training the teachers and staff received related to the freshman academy.
9. Describe any type(s) of transition programs in place for ninth-grade students.
10. Describe any orientation programs for ninth-grade students.
11. Describe any guidance practices that address the needs of ninth-grade students.
12. Describe any instructional changes you have noticed in the classrooms.
13. Describe how the academy addresses issues involving special needs students.
14. What additional resources are needed to support the academy?
15. Tell me about any support received from the District Office.
16. Tell me how you evaluate the success of the freshman academy.

The researcher emailed teachers in the freshman academy a survey (see Appendix A). The purpose of the survey was to discover other themes as they evolved from the responses and teacher perceptions of the freshman academy at the high school. The survey for this study was adapted from Perceptions of Academy, Ninth Grade Teacher Questionnaire (Potter, 2004). The researcher via electronic email obtained permission to use the above interview questions and as well as a survey to use for this study (see Appendix B). Teachers were asked to rate the freshman academy by selecting responses to the survey questions that best describe their perceptions of the freshman academy. Responses were ranked using a Likert scale. The rating for the Likert scale was designed using the following agreement scale: 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = disagree; and 5 = strongly disagree. The researcher used SPSS computer

data analysis to compile the survey data. Percentages of responses for each question were tallied and coded for analysis. Responses to the 15 items were scored using a 5-point Likert scale instrument asking teachers to respond to questions that were aligned with the research questions. The survey and Likert scale were selected as a means of collecting data because according to Coolican (1999), as cited in James (2001), participants prefer the Likert scaling technique because it is easy to complete and subjects are more directly involved. The Likert technique has been shown to produce a high level of validity and reliability. The Likert scale has been shown to be useful in measuring changes over time.

In addition to the written questionnaire and survey for teachers, the researcher constructed questions for the principal of the school (see Appendix C). The assistant superintendent for high school instruction from the central office was interviewed (see Appendix D). The researcher believed central office personnel would provide additional information to the knowledge base for this study. The researcher used a proxy to interview two focus groups of teachers. The purpose of the focus groups' interviews was to gain insightful information relative to the freshman academy at the high school and to discover other themes in order to provide additional information to the research. The questions were based on the research questions (see Appendix E). The researcher conducted telephone interviews with six high school principals to compare strategies used to address high school transition in the school district (see Appendix F).

Data Sources

The data for this study were gathered from the interviews with the principal, teachers, and guidance counselor of the freshman academy. The researcher gathered data from two focus groups consisting of three teachers per group of teachers in the freshman

academy. Data were gathered from a survey distributed and administered by the researcher. Additional data sources for the study came from interviewing central office personnel and archival school documents including test scores, attendance, and graduation rates.

Data Analysis

The researcher used content analysis and inductive analysis to analyze the data. Content analysis is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data. The content data from interviews and the survey provided data to determine what impact the freshman academy had on high school transition. The data was matched with pre-assigned themes to include implementation, classroom level changes, professional development, support structure, results, and evaluation. The content data helped determine the conditions that warranted a freshman academy and what the school district was doing to assist with transition. The content data from the interviews and survey also allowed the researcher to determine if the freshman academy was being operated as designed, and finally the content data provided the researcher with information regarding the impact the freshman academy had on attitude, motivation, and culture. The data is displayed in a frequency table identified, coded, and categorized based on the pre-assigned themes of implementation, classroom level changes, professional development, support structure, results, and evaluation (see Chapter 4 for distribution of theme frequencies). Strength code data for the pre-assigned themes are displayed in Chapter 4.

Inductive analysis refers to the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis that come from the data. The patterns, themes, and categories emerge out of the data rather than being imposed before data collection (Patton, 2002). The inductive data helped the

researcher discover other themes while gaining a deeper insight relative to the impact of the freshman academy at the high school. The inductive data are displayed in a frequency table identified, coded, and categorized based on the emerging themes of transition, communication, and relationship. Strength code data for the emerging themes will be displayed in Chapter 4. First the researcher organized and prepared the data for analysis by transcribing the interviews. The researcher read through all the transcriptions searching for general ideas and an overall meaning of the data. Once the data had been organized, the researcher analyzed the interview data according to the themes to include implementation, classroom level changes, professional development, support structure, results, and evaluation. Strength codes were used to identify the findings as follows: no response for a nonrecognition of developed themes; weak response for a one word reply; moderated response for a reply with a particular example of the theme; and a strong response for responses that included illustrations or gave more detailed information regarding a theme. The research questions helped guide the data coding process.

Validity of Findings

Validity is used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, or the readers of an account (Creswell, 2003). To check the accuracy of the findings in this study, the researcher used triangulation. Triangulation is a process used in qualitative research utilizing various data collection methods, data sources, analysis, or theories to obtain validity (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The various data collection for this study included interviews, a survey, and documents.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact a freshman academy had on high school transition. A high school in North Carolina that had implemented a freshman academy was the focus of this study. The high school, located in rural western North Carolina was targeted by the school district as one of six high schools in the district to implement a freshman academy. The school district identified the following problems at the high school over a 3-year period, 2001-2004, as a rationale for implementing a freshman academy: (a) student performance, (b) student attendance, and (c) graduation rates. The graduation rate at the high school was 64% compared to the state average of 69%. Student achievement on the state's ABC end-of-course tests showed 24% of the students in English I and 33% of the students in algebra I scored below grade level and lower than other students in the state. To determine the impact the freshman academy had on high school transition, the researcher collected data from teachers, central office personnel, the school principal and assistant principal, and the guidance counselor, as well as examined archival data to answer the following research questions:

1. What were the conditions that warrant a freshman academy?
2. What was the school system doing to address ninth-grade transition?
3. Was the freshman academy being operated as designed?
4. What was the impact of the freshman academy on the key contributors including motivation, attitude toward school, and school culture?

Data in this study were collected from a variety of sources including a survey of teachers in the freshman academy, an interview with teachers in the freshman academy, an interview with the principal and assistant principal, an interview with central office personnel, an interview with the guidance counselor, a telephone interview with six of the

principals at the largest high schools, and a focus group interview conducted by a proxy, with core teachers in the freshman academy. Data was also obtained from student achievement, student attendance, and discipline documents from the school. The researcher reviewed data from a smaller learning communities' grant which was the impetus for the freshman academy.

The 20-question survey was devised using KwikSurveys.com and emailed to the 16 teachers in the freshman academy. The teachers responded to the survey using a Likert-type scale to statements to discover emergent themes of the teachers' perceptions of the freshman academy. Teachers were invited to participate and respond to the survey via email. The responses were returned anonymously. The purpose of the survey was to obtain teacher perceptions of the freshman academy. Teachers were given a 3-week window in which to respond to the survey.

The researcher contacted the assistant superintendent of the district and the principal of the high school to explain the purpose of the study. The principal referred the researcher to the assistant principal overseeing the freshman academy. The purpose of the study was explained to the assistant principal. Dates and times were scheduled for the researcher to interview the assistant superintendent, principal, assistant principal, teachers, and guidance counselor of the freshman academy. The dates for gathering data were rescheduled due to inclement weather and the subsequent dates were rescheduled before Spring Break; therefore teacher interviews were limited to 9 of the 16 teachers. The guidance counselor was available for the interview. The purpose of the research was explained to each participant.

Teachers were interviewed individually in the assistant principal's office. The principal and assistant principal were interviewed in the principal's office; the assistant

superintendent was interviewed in his office. Only the interviewee and the researcher were present during each interview. The researcher worked with the school's administration to select participants who would be willing to participate in a focus group. The assistant principal secured six teachers who were willing to participate. A proxy served as the interviewer of the focus groups for the researcher. The proxy was a retired teacher who previously taught in a high school with a freshman academy. The purpose of the research was explained to each group. Only the proxy and the interviewees were present during the interview. The teachers were interviewed in two sessions because of class schedules. The interviews took place during the school day in the main building, separate from the freshman academy building. In session one, two teachers who taught different academic core subjects in the freshman academy and the guidance counselor were interviewed. In session two, three teachers who taught different academic core subjects were interviewed. The proxy reassured the teachers their comments would be viewed and analyzed by the researcher only. The proxy also reassured the teachers that their statements would be analyzed as a group. No names of participants were recorded by the proxy. The open-ended questions posed to teachers allowed participants to discuss the identified themes and any emergent themes from the interviews. The open-ended questions posed to the focus groups, principal, assistant principal, and assistant superintendent for secondary instruction allowed participants to discuss emergent themes.

The researcher interviewed six principals of the largest high schools via telephone as a follow-up to a recorded response from the assistant superintendent. The purpose of the research was explained to each participant. The researcher assured the principals that their names and the names of their schools would be viewed and analyzed by the researcher only.

The researcher taped school participants' responses to obtain information relative to their perceptions and experiences in the freshman academy and to understand the rationale and process for implementing a freshman academy at the high school. The assistant superintendent's responses were taped to discover any additional information for the study. In addition, responses from each focus group of teachers were taped by a proxy and transcribed by the researcher to discover other themes. Survey questionnaires were emailed to every teacher in the freshman academy. Teachers were asked to respond to the survey questions by selecting the responses that best describe their perception of the freshman academy at the high school. The responses from the taped interviews were transcribed and analyzed to correspond with the following common themes: implementation, classroom level changes, professional development, support structure, results, and evaluation. The researcher assigned strength codes for each theme depending on the response in each of the six themes to include strong response, moderate response, weak response, or no response. The teacher interviews were transcribed and analyzed based on six assigned themes: implementation, classroom level changes, support structure, results, professional development, and evaluation of the freshman academy. Survey results were analyzed by downloading the results from the electronic responses into an excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was imported into SPSS to determine frequency distribution.

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of the impact a freshman academy had at one high school. In order to ascertain answers relative to the impact the freshman academy has on high school transition at the high school, data reported in this chapter includes responses to and analysis of those responses from the following research questions:

1. What were the conditions that warrant a freshman academy?
2. What was the school system doing to address ninth-grade transition?
3. Was the freshman academy being operated as designed?
4. What was the impact of the freshman academy on the key contributors including motivation, attitude toward school, and school culture?

Participants

The research involved the assistant superintendent of secondary instruction who had been a former middle and high school principal. He was in the current position for 2 years. The principal of the high school, who was at the high school for 4½ years, the assistant principal, who was in charge of the freshman academy for 2 years, nine teachers with various teaching experiences, and one guidance counselor with 2 years of experience were involved in the research. Six principals or their designee from the largest high schools with a freshman academy also participated in this study.

The freshman academy at the high school, a component of the smaller learning communities' grant received by the school district, was implemented in 2004. The school district identified the following problems at the high school as a rationale for implementing a freshman academy: (a) student performance, (b) attendance rate, and (c) graduation rates. The graduation rate at the high school was 64% compared to the state average of 69%. The average attendance rate at the high school was 88% compared to 94% in the district and 95% in the state. Student achievement on the state's ABC end-of-course tests showed 24% of the students in English I and 33% of the students in algebra I scored below grade level and lower than other students in the state.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the

primary patterns in the data. The researcher sought to identify, code, and categorize patterns in the data based on the assigned themes of implementation, classroom level changes, professional development, support structure, results, and evaluation (see Table 2 for distribution of theme frequencies). The researcher audio taped and transcribed interviews from teachers, a guidance counselor, a principal, an assistant principal, and an assistant superintendent. Focus group interviews were audio taped by a proxy and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher read through the transcriptions searching for patterns in the responses to identify assigned themes in the responses. The researcher organized the response data according to the interview questions. The responses to the interviews were highlighted. Responses to the interview with nine teachers and one guidance counselor were analyzed using the following assigned themes: implementation, classroom level changes, professional development, support structure, results, and evaluation. The principal, assistant principal, and assistant superintendent interview responses and focus group responses were also analyzed for specific content relative to the themes. Interview responses were transcribed. The researcher reviewed the data for the pre-assigned themes. The responses were tallied for each of the themes from the interview data and are presented in a frequency table (see Table 2).

Table 2

Frequencies of Pre-Assigned Themes in Interviews

Themes	Teachers	Guidance Counselor	Principal/ Assistant Principal	Assistant Superintendent	Focus Group I	Focus Group II
Implementation	2	2	2	3	3	2
Classroom level changes	6	2	1	0	1	2
Support structure	8	3	1	1	2	3
Professional development	3	0	2	1	0	0
Results	5	1	2	0	0	0
Evaluations	7	0	2	0	0	0

Strength codes were assigned to each theme by the researcher based on the level of response in each of the six categories that included a no response for no identification of an assigned theme, weak response for a short one word answer, moderate response for a specific example, or strong response for answers involving elaboration of a theme (see Table 3). Interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 addressed implementation; questions 11, 12, and 13 addressed classroom level changes; questions 9, 10, 14, and 15 addressed support structure; question 16 addressed results; question 8 addressed professional development; and question 6 addressed evaluation. Teachers recorded an overall strength code by theme as moderate in implementation and weak in professional development. Strong responses were recorded in classroom level changes, support structure, results, and evaluation.

Table 3

Overall Strength Codes of Pre-Assigned Themes in Interviews

Themes	Teachers	Guidance Counselor	Principal/ Assistant Principal	Assistant Superintendent	Focus Group I	Focus Group II
Implementation	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Strong
Classroom level changes	Strong	Strong	Weak	NR	Moderate	Moderate
Support structure	Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	Strong	Strong
Professional development	Weak	NR	Strong	Strong	NR	NR
Results	Strong	Strong	Strong	NR	NR	NR
Evaluation	Strong	NR	Strong	NR	NR	NR

Note. NR = no response.

The guidance counselor recorded an overall strength code by theme as moderate in implementation. Strong responses were noted in classroom level changes, support structure, and results. No responses were recorded for professional development and evaluation.

The principal and assistant principal recorded an overall strength code by theme as moderate in implementation. A weak response was noted in classroom level changes. A moderate response was recorded in support structure. Strong responses were recorded in results, professional development, and evaluation.

The assistant superintendent recorded overall strength codes by themes as strong in implementation, support structure, and professional development. No responses were coded in classroom level changes, results, and evaluation.

Focus group I recorded overall strength codes by themes as moderate in implementation. A moderate strength code was recorded in classroom level changes. No

response was coded for professional development, results, and evaluation. Strong responses were noted in support structure.

Focus group II recorded overall strength codes by themes as strong in implementation. A moderate strength code was noted in classroom level changes. A strong response was recorded in support structure. No response was recorded for professional development, results, and evaluation. Table 2 illustrated themes while Table 3 presented the strength codes. A teacher perception survey was sent via email to the 16 teachers in the freshman academy. The survey consisted of 20 questions. The survey was designed with a 5-point Likert scale. Survey participants were asked to respond to the survey by selecting one of five choices on the Likert scale. The rating for the Likert scale was designed using the following agreement scale: 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = disagree; and 5 = strongly disagree.

The researcher collected survey data electronically from 13 of the 16 teachers in the freshman academy. The data were imported into an excel spreadsheet. The data were then imported into SPSS to determine frequency distribution (see Appendix G). Teacher mean scores for the survey varied from 1.38 to 4.15. The data indicated 84% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the items on the survey. The researcher's aim was to determine themes in teachers' perceptions of the freshman academy at the high school. Question 15 from the survey supported the implementation theme.

Classroom level changes were supported by questions 2 and 7. Support structure was supported in the survey with questions 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11. Questions 1, 4, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 supported the evaluation theme. Data did not reveal any results from the survey with regards to the themes of professional development and results. Analyses of documents associated with student performance, student attendance, and

graduation rates were reviewed and presented by the researcher to find out what impact the freshman academy had on high school transition at the high school with regard to student achievement, student attendance, and the graduation rates. The researcher used triangulation, a process used in qualitative research utilizing various data collection methods, data sources, analysis, or theories to obtain validity (Gall et al., 2003). The process of triangulation was used to verify data between survey information and survey results. Triangulation was also used to identify and discover themes among interview responses of participants.

Implementation

Responses from the individual teacher interviews revealed seven of the nine teachers did not know what the school was like prior to implementation. Their responses indicated they had not been at the high school before the implementation. Two of the teachers responded that they had been at the school prior to implementation. One of the two teachers who had been there prior to implementation stated,

The way it was set up, it was all departmentalized. The science was in the hallway, the English was in the hallway, history was in the hallway. Except for the EC everything was in the hallway. So everything and then the math had its own building in the hallway-type thing. And that's where everybody was, no real cross curriculum, it was everybody stuck to their own. So it wasn't the team as it is today.

The other teacher who had been at the high school prior to implementation responded there was no designated place for ninth graders prior to the implementation of the freshman academy and ninth graders were mixed in with upper classmen for some of the subjects. She stated, "Before freshman academy, kids were everywhere. There was no

designated place for freshmen or upper classmen or anything else.” The guidance counselor response indicated she had not been at the high school prior to implementation.

The principal indicated during the principal interview that the freshman academy was implemented at the school because of a smaller learning communities’ grant. During the implementation, according to the principal, the district office set the framework for orientation and location of the academy. The principal further stated that teachers volunteered to teach in the academy. The assistant principal was interviewed and stated that the whole academy concept was explained to teachers, and teachers in the academy were there because “they wanted to be.” Both the principal and assistant principal noted the freshman academy was in a separate place on the school’s campus. The principal stated that teachers in the freshman academy have common planning.

The response from the assistant superintendent revealed the freshman academy was implemented at the high school because of a smaller learning communities’ grant received by the district. He further maintained the smaller learning communities’ grant was to assist the high schools in the district with a student population of 1,000 plus students. The high school’s student population was 1,045 at the time of implementation.

When asked why there was a freshman academy at the high school, participants in focus group I agreed that other than the school had received a grant, freshmen have so many issues. One participant in the group stated,

Besides the smaller learning communities’ grant that we’re a part of, I think it’s because they saw that there were so many issues with freshmen. Due to the fact that if they don’t pass their classes, they’re going to have tendency to drop out, by the time they’re in ninth grade. Freshman is the biggest influential year when they get up here. This is when they are going to make it or break it. If you grab

them when they first get into high school, they know that there are people up here that care. We are still going to help them get through, then we can actually get them to be successful in high school.

Focus group II's response from their discussion indicated the freshman academy was implemented to assist students with the transition from middle school to high school.

Focus group II further maintained the freshman academy helped students realize they can be successful in high school.

According to the interview of teacher participants, although no specific responses were given, the teachers stated there was some input from the district office regarding the implementation of the freshman academy at the high school. When interviewed, the guidance counselor did not respond to this question.

Teachers indicated from individual interviews that the difficulties arose from scheduling and from those teachers who did not want to teach ninth-grade students during implementation. Difficulties and issues that arose since implementation included the behaviors of the students and a need for more interdisciplinary teaching. One of the teachers interviewed commented,

The issues that we saw were the teachers didn't actually want to teach freshmen. Being they are freshmen, they are the more difficult grade level. There were some teachers that did not want to teach freshmen at all. The guidance counselor responded having 300 freshmen as a "little bit daunting." She stated, I would say it may be a little stressing to be in the freshman academy at times. Because, you know, having 300 freshmen it's a little bit daunting because of the age and the maturity so, I definitely have a very busy office, a lot of drama, more so than the other grades. As they get older they kind of lose that. It's kind of a blessing and

a curse, because you get a little bit of everything at this age. You do a little bit more counseling. For me I get to do more counseling as a ninth-grade counselor. Whereas when you move up, you're getting them more ready for college post high school. I'll say if anything the sheer number of kids and the maturity level.

The teachers indicated any issues encountered were resolved through communication. In response to survey question number 3, 62% of the teachers strongly agreed that they are encouraged to communicate concerns, questions, and constructive ideas. The teachers maintained that being able to talk with each other, attend monthly meetings, and working with the assistant principal were ways they have dealt with any issues in the freshman academy. A teacher in focus group I stated, "The students were most challenging for me because they were so awkward and lacked maturity."

Classroom Level Changes

Teacher participants interviewed acknowledged hands-on activities, collaboration, and cross curriculum teaching as classroom level changes. Question number 7 of the teacher survey asked participants to indicate whether they used various instructional strategies in the freshman academy. Results from the teacher survey showed 100% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed various instructional strategies were used in the academy (see Table 4). Question number 2 of the teacher survey asked teachers to indicate whether they spent more time working together to develop and plan instruction. The results from the survey revealed 84% of the teachers strongly agreed or agreed that they spent more time working together to develop and plan instruction (see Table 4).

Table 4

Percent of Positive Responses from Survey Items Referencing Student Achievement

Survey Question	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
2. Teachers spend more time working together to develop and plan instruction	38	46	84
7. Teachers use various instructional strategies in the academy	46	54	100

An interviewed teacher responded that classes had been changed from 45 minutes daily all year to 90 minutes daily per semester. When asked about assisting special needs students, teachers noted at times there are two teachers in the classroom to assist with special needs students. They explained one teacher is a regular education teacher and the other teacher is an inclusion teacher because special needs students are mainstreamed into the regular classroom. During the interview, one of the teachers explained,

Some of our curriculum has what we call inclusion classes. These are the special needs that are not handicapped physically, but mentally in some way and/or emotionally or cognitively. And so we have several classes that are inclusion classes with two teachers in the room. So that we have the EC teacher to kind of help us with clarity and explanation. We plan together. I have one of the inclusion classes. And so the EC teacher, we sit down and go over lesson plans together. She brings to my attention the things that I might be doing that are confusing for a student that is not as academically talented as others. And who may have a cognitive problem with eye/hand coordination things. Things that I might do that I am not aware of that are hinders. So we work real close together,

so that I don't do anything that might hinder a student. Making sure that the activities that I plan that I might not think are hinders. Sometimes too many things that are going on at one time are hinders when you are doing an activity. Sometimes that happens, and you don't think about it. We do that a lot. That is a part of the freshman academy.

The teachers further noted during the interview sessions certain subjects such as math and science are taken together at a certain time while English and social studies are taken together at a certain time.

The guidance counselor stated during the interview that she taught dropout prevention classes to freshmen in the freshman seminar classes for 6 weeks. She further stated, "The lessons were geared toward helping some of our at-risk kids."

Teachers further revealed during the interview session that technology, such as smart boards and clickers, were being used to assist with instruction. They noted students were more apt to participate in classroom activities with the use of the technology devices. One teacher stated, "I use as much technology as I can possibly use because the kids love that stuff."

The principal and teachers indicated in their interview responses that there is a separate building for the freshmen, and teachers have common planning to collaborate and discuss issues pertaining to students. When asked if the academy was in a separate place, the principal responded, "Yes." The principal also stated teachers in the freshman academy had common planning. A teacher from the academy stated, "We are all over here in this little building by ourselves."

Support Structure

During the interview session, while all of the teachers did not specifically know of

any input from the central office, some of them did indicate there was some support. The teachers, however, maintained there was support for students in the form of advisory classes. The advisory classes help form student-teacher relationships. Teachers also discussed students being able to make up credits in a recovery room when the students failed a class. For those students who failed a class, a recovery room was available for students to recover credit for the failed class. Instead of taking an elective class, students took the failed class over.

The teachers maintained during the individual interview session that the freshman seminar was a program for at-risk students. The teachers contended that this program helps students with study habits, helps them be responsible, and assists them with homework.

During the discussions with the two focus groups, both focus groups talked about a course specifically for freshmen, called freshman seminar. They indicated not all students were enrolled in this class. Focus group I indicated the course was designed specifically for those students who entered the high school with behavior issues, attendance issues, and grade issues. This course was designed to help those students who are identified at risk when they enter high school. According to a teacher in focus group I, “we talk about responsibility, we talk about integrity. We talk about all these different life issues.” Focus group II maintained all freshmen need social skills’ building and “all that stuff we did in freshman seminar, but not everybody gets put into it.”

According to all teachers interviewed, there is an orientation program allowing eighth graders to come over to the school with their parents, get their schedules, meet their teachers, and tour the building. When asked question number 10, to describe any orientation programs for ninth graders, one teacher responded,

They have an orientation program that they can go to at the beginning of the school year. They get their schedules and they can go around the school and find out where their classroom is. They can put a face with their teacher's name. Mr. Principal and Mr. Assistant Principal go around and they see the parents and their kids and get them orientated that way.

Teachers maintained in the discussion that they felt more money and technology were needed as resources in the freshman academy. Monetary support for the freshman academy at the high school was realized through a smaller learning communities' grant. The researcher examined the grant documents to determine what kind of support was offered. Because of the smaller learning communities' grant, the high school has a full-time administrator and a ninth-grade guidance counselor. The principal further stated during the interview,

The implementation of the freshman academy was a part of a smaller learning communities' grant that our six largest high schools received. I want to say 3 years ago maybe 4 years ago, that's right. It was that mechanism by which we were able to put freshman academy together.

The principal and assistant principal maintained when interviewed that there was a great deal of input from the central office during implementation. The principal further shared in the discussion that the central office set a list of nonnegotiables such as the orientation framework and location of the freshman academy.

The assistant superintendent indicated from his interview that the central office helped support the academy with scheduling and professional development, and set standards for what the freshman academy should look like. "These standards included a principal of the ninth-grade academy who would actually be an assistant principal in the

high school, a ninth-grade counselor, teachers selected by the principal to teach in the freshman academy.” The assistant principal would work with the counselor and graduation coach in the academy regarding registration, scheduling, parent contact, attendance, discipline, and graduation requirements. Other standards included holding academy teacher meetings at least once a month during the teachers’ planning times utilizing a written agenda, organizing two teacher teams, instituting a mentor or buddy program for freshmen using 10th-12th graders as mentors or buddies, and establishing student advisors for ninth graders. The assistant superintendent further stated another standard was for teachers to “foster what the relationship would be between the teachers in the freshman academy and the students.”

Professional Development

The teachers pointed out during the interview that there was no specific professional development related to freshman academy by the district or the school. One teacher did indicate there had been some training to enhance instruction.

The assistant principal stated during the interview, “There are ongoing monthly professional development opportunities with the freshman academy staff. Professional development activities included an in book study, *Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne, professional learning communities, and cross-curricular teaming.” He indicated each department met one time a month to discuss Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. The principal indicated professional development was arranged based on the subjects taught in the freshman academy.

The assistant superintendent noted in his interview response that money for staff development was given to the schools. He also stated in the interview, “the central office made some suggestions for professional development, but the principals along with the

school improvement team decided on what professional development took place at the school.” The assistant superintendent further indicated the school had done some professional development with relationships in regards to the operation of the freshman academy.

Results

According to teachers’ responses during the individual interviews, results of the freshman academy are determined by test scores on benchmarks and end-of-course tests. Some of the teachers said they surveyed students about their classes. The teachers used the survey results to determine how they were doing as teachers and what the students thought about them. Teachers stated this information would be beneficial to help them assist students and improve as teachers. The guidance counselor stated students are surveyed relative to their feelings about safety, academics, and if the students think they are prepared for high school. She also maintained teachers use benchmark tests to determine results. The principal indicated results are measured through discipline data, successful completion of requirements for freshmen to become sophomores, benchmarking, test scores, and “eventually graduation rights.” The assistant principal results were also measured by attendance.

Evaluation

When asked about how the freshman academy was evaluated, the teachers interviewed noted the success of the academy was evaluated using tests scores on the end-of-year tests, the number of office referrals, and attendance. Teachers also stated student participation in afterschool events and extracurricular activities also contributed to the success of the academy. Another teacher commented, “It’s not just about their grades and part of it is behavior and grades. We want them to do well and we want them

to be okay emotionally too. So we kind a surround them and do that big group hug thing.”

The principal indicated from his interview response that the academy is evaluated through the measurable goals of discipline data, successful completion of the requirements for freshmen to be promoted, benchmark tests, end-of-course test scores, and graduation. The assistant principal added another measurable goal was attendance. When asked how teachers are evaluated, the assistant principal stated, “I am very visible. I think if you ask the teachers, they will tell you that I am always in the hallways during class changes. I am in and out of the classrooms checking on how the kids are doing. I am always emailing folks about what my expectations are.” The principal stated teachers are evaluated through the use of formal observations of teachers and walk through observations by the administration. The principal also added, “a true measure of implementation of the freshman academy would not be evident until the end of the current school year.”

Inductive Analysis

During the analysis of the data from the interview responses, other themes emerged. According to Patton (2002), inductive analysis refers to the patterns, themes, and categories of analyses that come from the data. The patterns, themes, and categories emerge out of the data rather than being imposed before data collection (Patton, 2002). Three themes that emerged from the interview responses were transition, communication, and relationships. Table 5 illustrates themes and Table 6 shows strength codes.

Table 5

Frequencies of Inductive Emerging Themes in Interviews

Themes	Teachers	Guidance Counselor	Principal/ Assistant Principal	Assistant Superintendent	Focus Group I	Focus Group II
Transition	5	2	0	2	0	2
Communication	6	2	1	0	0	2
Relationships	0	3	0	1	2	2

Table 6

Overall Inductive Strength Codes of Emerging Themes in Interviews

Themes	Teachers	Guidance Counselor	Principal/ Assistant Principal	Assistant Superintendent	Focus Group I	Focus Group II
Transition	Moderate	Strong	NR	Weak	NR	Moderate
Communication	Strong	Moderate	Weak	NR	NR	Strong
Relationships	NR	Strong	NR	Strong	Moderate	Weak

Note. NR = no response.

Research Question 1. What were the conditions that warrant a freshman academy? Responses from question number 2 of the teachers and guidance counselor interviews, question number 8 of the principal's interview and question number 2 of the focus groups were analyzed to answer this question. Two of the teachers indicated from their responses that the freshman academy was implemented at the high school because of a grant the district received from a smaller learning communities' grant.

In addition to the teachers' responses, the responses from the principal, assistant

principal, and assistant superintendant were analyzed to find a correlation between the responses. The responses from the principal and assistant principal of the high school indicated the decision to implement a freshman academy at the high school was because of a smaller learning communities' grant. During the interview, the principal stated,

The implementation of the freshman academy was a part of a smaller learning communities' grant that our six largest high schools received. I want to say 3 years ago maybe 4 years ago, that's right...all ninth-grade students came through freshman academy their first year here.

The response from the assistant superintendent revealed the freshman academy was implemented at the high school because of a smaller learning communities' grant received by the district. According to the assistant superintendent, the district wanted to assist high schools with a student population of 1,000 plus students. The student population was 1,145 at the time of the grant.

The researcher reviewed the document from the smaller learning communities' grant to determine the premise for implementing a freshman academy. According to the document, the grant would provide intensive interventions for struggling students who enter high school below grade level in English, math, and science.

Archival student achievement data gathered from the district prior to the implementation of the freshman academy at the high school showed students in the ninth grade scored below the state average in English I for 3 consecutive years. Students scored below the state average in algebra I 1 year prior to implementation (see Table 7).

Table 7

Percentage of Ninth-Grade Students Passing State End-of-Grade Tests Prior to and Since Implementation of Freshman Academy

Implementation	Subject	
	English I	Algebra I
Prior to implementation		
2001-2002	66.2	81.0
2002-2003	73.1	71.4
2003-2004	76.5	80.3
Since implementation		
2004-2005	84.1	76.5
2005-2006	80.2	66.9
2006-2007	76.2	79.1
2007-2008	70.0	72.7

The attendance rate for students prior to implementation was 90.2% (see Table 8). The 4-year cohort graduation rates for students entering ninth grade prior to 2002 were not calculated by the state. Therefore, the graduation rates for students entering ninth grade in 2002 and 2003 are shown in Table 9.

Table 8

Ninth-Grade Student Attendance Rates Prior to and Since Implementation of Freshman Academy

Implementation	Attendance Rate (%)
Prior to implementation	
2001-2002	90.7
2002-2003	91.7
2003-2004	90.2
Since implementation	
2004-2005	91.0
2005-2006	90.0
2006-2007	91.0
2007-2008	91.0

Table 9

Ninth-Grade Student Graduation Rates Prior to and Since Implementation of Freshman Academy

Implementation	Graduation Rate (%)
Prior to implementation	
2005-2006	63.9
2006-2007	68.6
Since implementation	
2007-2008	69.0
2008-2009	61.6

Research Question 2. What was the school system doing to address ninth-

grade transition? To address this question, the researcher interviewed the assistant superintendent of secondary instruction for the district. Question number 1 from the interview with central office personnel addressed this question. The assistant superintendent stated six of the largest high schools in the district were a part of the smaller learning communities' grant. The high school was chosen because of its student population of 1,000 plus students. He further stated each of the six high schools in the district had a freshman academy. According to the assistant superintendent, part of the role of the central office was to set the expectation for organization. He stated,

We wanted a principal of the ninth-grade academy, which would in effect be an assistant principal in a large high school. We wanted a counselor that would look after those kids that were ninth graders. And, we wanted the principal to pick the teachers to teach in that ninth-grade academy.

The assistant superintendent further stated, "central office set the perimeters for what a freshman academy should look like in terms of how the relationship piece of the academy would work." He noted in adding the relationship piece, ninth graders would have advisors to work with them. The central office, according to the assistant superintendent, would assist in fostering the relationship between the teachers in the freshman academy and the students. The assistant superintendent indicated the central office assisted the academy with class scheduling through the use of NC Wise. He maintained the assistant principal and a team of teachers worked together with the central office in the class scheduling process.

In a follow-up interview with the assistant superintendent, he maintained a freshman academy was one strategy used in the district to address ninth-grade transition in the six largest high schools. He indicated three other strategies used to address ninth-

grade transition in those six high schools were the use of student mentors, freshman orientation, and summer transition camps.

The researcher interviewed a focus group of six high school principals of the largest high schools via telephone. Response data from the six high school principals at schools with a freshman academy are illustrated in Table 10.

Table 10

Principals' Responses to Transition Strategies used at High Schools with Freshman Academies

Principal	Transition Strategy		
	Summer Camp	Student Mentors	Freshman Orientation
Principal 1	Yes		Yes
Principal 2	Yes		Yes
Principal 3	Yes	Yes	Yes
Principal 4	Yes		Yes
Principal 5			Yes
Principal 6			Yes

Each of the principals indicated their schools offered freshman orientation before the beginning of the school year. Four of the principals indicated the incoming ninth graders were involved in a summer camp. The summer camp included activities to familiarize ninth-grade students with the campus by having ninth graders participate in a scavenger hunt. One of the respondents indicated ninth graders were also assigned mentors to assist them. These mentors were in Grades 11 or 12.

One of the principals commented,

In addition to the day of orientation, we have a 3-hour summer camp for the upcoming ninth graders. They are involved in character building activities, assigned an upperclassman mentor who assists them throughout their freshman year. They participate in scavenger hunts to familiarize themselves with the school and the school environment. They get a chance to meet their teachers and ask questions.

When asked to describe any transition programs for ninth graders in question number 9, the guidance counselor stated, “I, along with the principal and assistant principal, visited the middle schools to register future ninth graders and did a presentation on schedules and what rising ninth graders could expect in high school.”

The counselor indicated the registration was done one on one with each student in order to make the eighth graders feel more comfortable and feel as if they were receiving personalized attention. The counselor further indicated that she was trying to put into operation workshops on “study skills, girl drama, and all the stuff that they encounter once they first get here.” She also stated the eighth graders came over to the school to take a tour of the school.

Question number 10 from the teacher interviews asked teachers to describe any orientation programs for ninth graders. Respondents from the teacher interviews indicated there was an orientation program for ninth graders prior to beginning the school year. The orientation program varied from 2 hours at night to a half day for ninth-grade students and their parents. Focus group I respondents indicated there was no prescribed kind of orientation program for ninth graders. They indicated “in the past few years, the orientation has been set up differently.”

Research Question 3. Is the freshman academy being operated as designed?

One of the goals for the freshman academy was to assist with freshman transition to high school. According to the assistant superintendent, meetings would be scheduled with students and their parents to meet the school staff and experience the facilities before the actual school year began. The assistant superintendent further maintained the freshman academy would be designed to include common planning for teachers and monthly meetings with teachers. The design of the academy would include a separate setting in close proximity within the school in order to foster relationships with the teachers and ninth-grade students. The academy was to have a guidance counselor and an assistant principal as its designated leader. During the interview with the administration, the assistant principal stated, “We have ongoing monthly meetings with freshman academy staff and departmental meetings for professional development once a month.” The principal indicated teachers had common planning based on the subjects they taught.

Teachers from individual interviews generally maintained a guidance counselor is assigned solely to students in the freshman academy. One teacher, responding to interview question number 11 which asked teachers to describe any guidance practices that addressed the needs of ninth-grade students, stated, “We have a ninth-grade guidance counselor, and she is real good to step in when we start having problems with the kids, and gives us some help in that way.” Another teacher stated,

It really helps to have the guidance counselor who works solely with the freshmen. I know who to send students to when so and so’s schedule is kind a messed up and say, “You need to fix this.” And if I am having a problem with a kid, it’s nice to go to her and say “Could we figure something out that would be better for the student and for me as a teacher or any other teacher.” The guidance

office works pretty well with our kids. It really does help to have a ninth-grade counselor that really focuses solely on our kids, who is willing to take the time out to say you're having a problem. Let's take the time out to see how I can help you.

During the teacher interview session, one teacher responding to interview question number 9 which asked teachers to describe any transition programs for ninth graders stated, "We have a summer orientation where the eighth graders will come over. They have a parent meeting; this will give them the opportunity to get their schedules earlier. They could go through and meet their teachers and walk through the building."

The guidance counselor for the freshman academy, responding to interview question number 9, stated,

So with the orientation here at the high school, it was here in the auditorium Mr. Principal and Mr. Assistant Principal presented somewhat of the same information that we did at a parent night in February. It was more about the rules and what to expect when you got here. The students had their schedules and they could go around and come through the freshmen building. There was a walk through with their schedules and to meet their teachers. It's like a run through a typical day.

During the interview with focus group II, a teacher commented,

I like the fact that we deal with one administrator. I think that is a total benefit of the freshman academy, that he is charge of all of the kids. We know what his style of discipline is, we know what he's going to do, we know what to expect, we know what he wants from us verses in the Upper Academies, you got three administrators and they all deal with the kids in their own different ways.

Another teacher in focus group II made the following comment:

I like that he is as one with us as an administrator. So that's a total benefit as a freshman academy. He is in charge of all the kids. We know what his style of discipline is. We know what to expect from him. We know what he wants from us, verses up here you have three administrators that you are reporting to. And each one of them wants something different. And they work with the kids in their own different way. So I like the fact that it's only one administrator.

In regard to establishing relationships as described by the assistant superintendent, a teacher from focus group I stated, "I love freshman academy because of the connection with the teachers and the willingness to help students. And I think most of us share in a common hope for the kids. I think that we all share that hope for the kids." Another teacher from focus group I commented, "It makes coming to work a lot more fun. The kids see that too and they know if this teacher that I don't have something to say to me, that's my teacher's friend. She's going to know if I made her mad."

In analyzing responses from the Teacher Perceptions Survey noted in Table 11, 73% of the teachers indicated in statement number 1 that communication between students and teachers had improved since implementation of the freshman academy. Ninety-two percent of the teachers responded in statement number 8 that they fostered relationships with students since the implementation. Ninety-two percent of the teachers responded to statement number 9 that they were involved in decision making related to the freshman academy, while all of the teachers responded to statement number 10 that teachers work together to achieve goals since implementation of the freshman academy.

Table 11

Percentage of Positive Responses from Survey Items Referencing Implementation

Survey Questions	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
1. Communication between students and teachers has improved	30.8%	42.6%	73.4%
8. Teachers foster relationships with students	38.5%	53.8%	92.2%
9. Teachers are involved in decision making as it relates to the freshman academy	46.2%	46.2%	92.4%
10. Teachers work together to achieve goals	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%

Two other goals for designing and implementing the freshman academy were to improve student achievement and student attendance. The researcher used a Teacher Perception Survey (see Appendix A) to survey teachers in the freshman academy to determine their perceptions regarding the impact the freshman academy had on student achievement and student attendance. The researcher sent the survey via email to the 16 teachers in the academy. A total of 13 teachers responded to the survey. The return rate of the teacher survey was 81%.

Statement number 12 on the Teacher Perception Survey indicated 69.2% of the freshman academy teachers agreed or strongly agreed that student test scores had improved since implementation of the freshman academy. Statement number 14 from the Teacher Perception Survey indicated 61.5% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed grades had improved since the implementation of the freshman academy (see Table 12). The total percentage of ninth-grade students in the freshman academy passing English I for 4 years since the implementation of the freshman academy was 76.0, while the total

percentage of ninth-grade students in the freshman academy passing algebra I was 73.81 (refer to Table 7).

Table 12

Frequency of Positive Responses from Survey Items Referencing Student Achievement

Survey Questions	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
12. Test scores have improved	46.2%	23.0%	69.2%
14. Grades have improved	53.8%	7.7%	61.5%

Statement 13 from the Teacher Perception Survey asked teachers to indicate whether student tardiness had improved since the implementation of the freshman academy. Fifty-three percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed student tardiness had improved. Based on statement 18 regarding student attendance, 46.2% of the teachers surveyed agreed student attendance had improved since implementation of the freshman academy and 46.2% neither agreed nor disagreed that student attendance had improved since implementation of the freshman academy. Responses to Teacher Perception Survey items referencing student attendance are shown in Table 13.

Table 13

Frequency of Positive Responses from Survey Items Referencing Student Attendance

Survey Question	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
13. Tardiness has improved	46.2%	23.0%	69.2%
18. Attendance has improved	53.8%	7.7%	61.5%

Research Question 4. What was the impact of the freshman academy on the key contributors including motivation, attitude toward school, and school culture?

To answer this question, the researcher analyzed the data from individual teacher interviews, focus group interviews, and the Teacher Perception Survey.

As noted in Chapter 2, Worley (2007) defined student motivation as “a desire to engage in the learning process” (p. 46). The freshman academy teachers indicated students were involved in the learning process. Participants in focus group I maintained students interact with each other to promote learning. One teacher from the group stated, “They tell the other peers ‘you better study; you better do this work, because it’s not hard. I mean, if you just don’t do it, because you’re lazy, you’re going to be here again.’”

Teachers indicated they use various teaching techniques to motivate students.

Participants in focus group II commented they used various instructional strategies to motivate students. One of the participants stated, “We work in groups, we work in pairs. We lay down on the floor with maps. Anything, we use the CPS systems, the smart board games, the computer, anything that’s not the same old thing every day. Everything and anything you think of we try.” Survey question number 7 asked teachers to indicate whether they used various instructional strategies in the academy. All of the teachers strongly agreed or agreed that they used various instructional strategies.

In regard to attitude toward school, research cited in Chapter 2 noted it is important for students to realize positive experiences with teachers and peers in order to avoid alienation and negative self-perceptions (Murdock et al., 2000). Teachers indicated the freshman academy contributed to students’ attitudes toward school. According to the teachers, the freshman academy was viewed as a means to help students succeed in high school. Participants from focus group II maintained because students perceive the

teachers are willing to help them be successful, they are motivated within the learning environment. A teacher from focus group II maintained the ability for teachers in the freshman academy to change the classroom environment for students has impacted attitude. The teacher stated,

One of the other things that we have too, we have common planning periods for the common curriculum classes so that if for example, one of us has a student first period and it's just not working for us, they just won't do anything for us, they hate our guts, whatever the situation is, we can transfer them out that class into another class, same subject, same class period of the day, but different teacher. I had a case where she got one of mine and I got one of hers traded out. It worked out pretty good. We were able to swap because we taught the same thing at the same time of day. We gave two students a different environment, a different teacher, different way of presenting materials.

The data analyzed from the focus groups' responses revealed the freshman academy has contributed to the freshman academy teachers' attitudes toward school. A participant from focus group II commented, "It's hard work, everybody that's in there now works together.... We all get along well; we all want to be in there with that group." A teacher responding to question number 5 on the teacher questionnaire which asked teachers to describe ways they had dealt with any difficulties or issues stated,

The freshman academy has been really good. We bounce things off of each other. And if we are having a difficult time we meet, we talk about ideas backwards and forwards. We really get along really well. We all have the same goals in mind. This group over here really meshes really well together. So it's just been awesome over here.

Survey question number 4 asked teachers to indicate whether they liked working in the freshman academy. Eighty-four percent of the teachers strongly agreed or agreed they liked working in the freshman academy.

In regard to school culture, Prichard et al. (2005) acknowledged a positive educational culture consists of a sense of belongingness to the school. A teacher interviewed commented,

They get good grades on the EOC but when they are coming after school for the extracurricular things, and they are joining clubs, and they are joining, that's buy in. More and more I see a banner hanging up here with the signatures on them, 2012 graduates. You will be surprised at the students that stop and say, "Hey my name is up there." That little bitty banner causes a lot of pride, so they can stop and look at it. Some of the same kids stop and look at it every single day.

Smith (2007), cited in Chapter 2 in regard to culture, maintained that values and beliefs are expressed in the way teachers view themselves as part of the school, the district, and the community. A participant from focus group II stated, "We understand that we are teachers first and then, the subject." These expectations and behaviors represent the norms (Smith, 2007). Data from individual teacher interviews and focus group I discussions indicated teachers are collaborating with each other about students and the curriculum. Teachers revealed during the interview that they meet once a month for professional meetings to "bounce things off each other." Teachers in focus group I indicated they could talk to each other and share with each other outside of school as well as in school. One teacher stated, "We share happy things with each other. We don't always talk about the students." Another teacher commented, "We've done things outside of school, like gone to dinner." Data also revealed the freshman academy has

promoted a relationship among students. Teachers were asked to indicate in survey question number 5 whether or not students are encouraged to help others with problems. Sixty-two percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that students were encouraged to help others.

In schools, there are certain expectations and behaviors communicated to students by teachers (Smith, 2007). Students in the academy recognized teachers have expectations and teachers care about them. Survey question number 6 asked teachers to indicate whether teachers in the academy communicated expectation to students. All of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed expectations were communicated to students. A participant from the focus group I discussions stated, “They learn exactly what expectations are at the high school. They learn how they’re going to be, how they need to behave, how they’re going to take their classes.” Another participant from focus group I commented,

I have one that comes in everyday and asks, “What do I have to do today?” I tell him, “We got business; I know you can do it.” He will say, “Okay I’ll do it.” I want him to do well, so he’ll do it because he doesn’t want to let me down.

Participants from focus group I interviews maintained certain expectations have been set for the students as ninth graders that will carry over to upper grades. Teachers agreed as one of them said, “We set expectations in the freshman academy so when they get to 10th grade, 11th grade, the teachers don’t have to mold them.”

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the impact of a freshman academy on high school transition at one high school. All findings relative to the research questions were analyzed. The discussion throughout the chapter provided a detailed description of the

analysis conducted and results from the investigation. Three themes—transition, communication, and relationships—emerged from the interview responses from central office and teachers.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

Students transitioning to high school from middle school are adolescents undergoing emotional, physical, social, and intellectual challenges (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Because these students are in transition in every aspect of their lives, the change or transition from middle school to high school presents yet another challenge for them. This case study examined the impact of a freshman academy on high school transition. A high school located in rural western North Carolina was the focus of this study. Cook et al. (2008) maintained freshman academies provide incoming ninth-grade students with additional resources and personalized support to overcome transitional obstacles.

The purpose of the freshman academy in this study was to increase (a) student performance, (b) attendance rate, and (c) the high school's graduation rate. The findings of this study were organized around the pre-assigned themes discussed in the study to include implementation, classroom level changes, support structure, professional development, results, and evaluation. The findings of a survey conducted to determine teachers' perceptions of the freshman academy will be presented as they relate to the themes and research questions. The survey was constructed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. An analysis of archived documents, interviews with teachers, a guidance counselor, principals, and central office personnel, and two focus groups are presented in the findings as they relate to the common themes and research questions. An outside proxy interviewed the two focus groups and the researcher conducted telephone interviews with the six high school principals. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What were the conditions that warranted a freshman academy?
2. What was the school system doing to address ninth-grade transition?
3. Was the freshman academy being operated as designed?
4. What was the impact of the freshman academy on the key contributors including motivation, attitude toward school, and school culture?

Summary

Implementation. Based on the findings of this study, the freshman academy at the high school was implemented because of problems with student achievement, student attendance, and the graduation rate. The district acquired funds from a smaller learning communities' grant to implement the academy. Resources from the grant were used to assist with the implementation of freshman academies at six of the large high schools in the district. The assistant superintendent's response was recorded as strong describing the process for implementing freshman academies in the school district. The findings revealed seven of the nine teachers or more than half of the teachers were not at the school before or during implementation. These findings were demonstrated during the interview discussions with teachers. However, strong responses were recorded from participants in both focus groups and the teachers who had prior knowledge of the school before and during implementation. They shared that the implementation of a freshman academy was due to ninth-grade students' needs associated with the transition to high school. As a result of their responses, transition emerged as a theme and was coded as a strong response. Implementation of a freshman academy at the high school in this study to assist ninth graders with transition to high school was supported by studies noting that freshman academies provide ninth-grade students with a nurturing environment for the successful transition from middle school to high school.

Classroom level changes. The teachers contributed through interview discussions that prior to the implementation of the freshman academy, ninth-grade students were mixed in with upper-grade students. All students were assigned six classes for 45 minutes each. Teachers in the focus groups shared during discussions that after implementation of the freshman academy, only first-time ninth graders were assigned to the freshman academy. Discussions further revealed students' classes were set up on a block schedule, allowing students to attend four 90-minute classes per day for each semester. The academy was organized with two teacher teams. Teachers acknowledged the scheduling afforded them more time for instruction, while teaming allowed for cross curriculum instruction. In addition to teaming, teachers shared during the interview session that inclusion classes were set up for special needs students. The teachers of the special needs students teamed with the regular education teacher during the class period. Teachers indicated they used various instructional strategies, including technology, in an effort to reach all students. Research implies block scheduling allows teachers to spend more time with instruction and gives students more time for learning and mastery.

Support structure. Through interview discussions with the teachers, it was revealed that, prior to entering the ninth grade at the high school, students were involved in freshman orientation activities to get acclimated to the school. The guidance counselor and principal at the school in this study maintained that they met with students at the middle school to schedule classes prior to students entering ninth grade. Interview discussions revealed students and parents were invited to attend school, meet teachers, and familiarize themselves with the school. The students who entered the ninth grade with academic, attendance, or behavior problems were enrolled in a special course called freshman seminar to help them adjust to high school. In addition, the guidance counselor

conveyed that dropout prevention classes specifically targeting at-risk students were offered during the freshman seminar course. She also revealed that students who had failed a course the previous semester were allowed to recover by taking the failed class over for credit. The assistant superintendent conveyed that the central office provided assistance with scheduling of classes for the freshman academy. Teachers expressed that they felt supported by the administrator of the freshman academy; and the district had supported them by providing monies to include technology for instruction.

Professional development. The teachers revealed during interviews that there was no specific professional development for teachers prior to the implementation of the academy. Teachers and the assistant principal, however, did discuss their attendance at monthly meetings and that they were engaged in a book study, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, with the assistant principal, the freshman academy administrator. Studies suggest professional development for all stakeholders is important in the sustainability of any new program. Although there was a lack of school-wide professional development regarding the freshman academy, the researcher contends if all stakeholders had been better informed regarding the academy and adolescents, the teachers would have gained more insight to better assist students and the learning environment.

Results. The Teacher Perception Survey showed teachers believed student achievement had improved. The results from the school's data revealed an increase in the English I end-of-grade test scores but no increase in the algebra I test scores. The increase in student performance in English I and the lack of increase in algebra I, the researcher believes, may be attributed to the changing of performance standards of the state's math test a year after the freshman academy was implemented. Results for the 4-

year cohort graduation rates showed a slight increase of 4%. The survey responses regarding attendance indicated there was no change in the attendance rate since implementation of the academy. Comparable data from school data supported no change in the attendance rate. In regards to attendance, research shows students who are successful in high school attend school regularly (Mizelle, 2005). In that regard, the researcher found the freshman academy impacted the graduation rate; however, it did not impact student attendance.

Evaluation. The teachers discussed that they believed the once a month meetings and time to collaborate improved communication for the freshman academy staff. Communication emerged as a theme throughout the discussions with teachers and was coded as strong. Survey responses supported communication as strong in the Teacher Perception Survey. Teachers also agreed the change from 45-minute classes to 90 minutes allowed them more time for instruction and building relationships with students. The high school principal during an interview suggested that the success of the academy is evaluated based on the tests scores, completion of the freshman year, and “eventually graduation rights.”

Summary of themes. Teacher interviews and focus group interviews presented similar data in regard to the pre-assigned themes. Strong responses were recorded in classroom level changes, support structure, results, and evaluation. Moderate responses were coded in implementation and weak responses were recorded in professional development.

Based on the content and inductive analysis of the data collected in Chapter 4, conclusions are presented and discussed by the four research questions:

1. What were the conditions that warranted a freshman academy?

Morton (2005), citing earlier research by Donohoe and Zigmond (1990), noted ninth graders experienced academic difficulties upon the transition to high school because for the first time students in the ninth grade must take and pass required courses for graduation. The archived data from the district revealed the high school in this study was targeted for implementation of a freshman academy because of poor student performance on the ninth grade English I and algebra I state mandated tests, low student attendance, and a lower than average graduation rate. Prior to implementation of the freshman academy, student performance on the state's end-of-grade tests in English I and algebra I showed students scored lower than other students in the state. The graduation rate at the high school was 64% compared to the state average of 69%. The average attendance rate at the high school was 88% compared to 94% in the district and 95% in the state. The basis for implementing a freshman academy at the high school was supported by Mizelle's (2005) research noting students transitioning from middle school to high school can experience a decline in grades, attendance problems, and failure to graduate. Although the data from the district in this study identified problems at the high school, it did not identify conditions for the problems that warranted a freshman academy. It is worth noting that the research literature in this study maintained ninth graders may encounter problems with transition because of certain conditions. These conditions include students' attitudes toward school, student motivation, and the culture of the school. Ragland (2008) contended that motivation is an important reason for poor student achievement. He further noted certain teaching and administrative practices and the school's atmosphere could contribute to motivation. Letrello (2002) revealed in her study that students' attitudes affected student performance. Pritchard et al. (2005) determined the culture of the school could contribute to the problems students face as

they transition from middle school to high school.

2. What was the school district doing to address ninth-grade transition?

The research literature in Chapter 2, Chmelynski (2004), noted districts across the nation were implementing freshman academies to assist with high school transition. In an attempt to address ninth-grade transition, the school district in this study utilized funds acquired from a smaller learning communities' grant to implement freshman academies. The school district put into operation freshman academies at six of its high schools with a student population in excess of 1,000 students. The student population for the high school at the time of this study was 1,041. In addition to implementing the freshman academies, the school district put several strategies in place to address ninth-grade transition including providing freshman orientation, summer camps for rising freshmen, and assigning upper class student mentors to assist ninth-grade students. The research literature, Cooper and Markoe-Hayes (2005), supported these strategies in noting students are fearful of the large physical layouts and the increased number of students on campus. It is important because students entering high school for the first time may become lost. Implementing these strategies is also congruent with Pitts's (2005) research noting participation in summer camps and assigning advocates produced improvement in grades and behavior for ninth-grade students.

3. Was the freshman academy at the high school being operated as designed?

The design of the freshman academy in this study was operated to support students in transition. Through discussions with the school's principal, assistant principal, and teachers, they acknowledged the freshman academy at the high school was designed to separate ninth graders from the rest of the student body in a building designated specifically for first-time ninth graders with one administrator and one

guidance counselor. Research by Queen (2002) upheld that the intent of freshman academies is to specifically place ninth graders in a designated location of a high school, isolating them from the rest of the student population providing for gradual transition into high school. McDaniel's (2008) research recommends that having one administrator promotes consistency, uniformity, and equity with regards to student issues. The academy was designed with only those teachers who wanted to teach in the freshman academy in order to "look after" students who are ninth graders. The principal conveyed that the teachers volunteered to teach in the academy. This supports research that suggests providing students with teachers who care about them during their transition is important. Researchers Newman et al. (2000) maintained that students who perceived teachers did not care about them may become disengaged and withdrawn. Each teacher in the freshman academy in this study was on a team. Teaming allowed the teachers to plan together and collaborate on issues related to students and the curriculum. Cook et al. (2008) ascertained freshman academies should be designed to allow for collaboration and planning among teachers in order to benefit students academically. Teachers perceived that having one guidance counselor assisted students in knowing specifically where to go for assistance with day-to-day "drama." The guidance counselor viewed her role as important, not only in helping diffuse conflicts, but also as offering assistance to keep students from dropping out of school by providing classes that support students in transition. Research indicates dropping out of school is a cumulative process manifesting predictable behaviors, such as increased disengagement and declining motivation during the period of transition to high school (Chmelynski, 2004).

The district's goal for the design of the freshman academy was to improve student performance, student attendance, and the graduation rate. Although the Teacher

Perception Survey indicated 69.2% of the freshman academy teachers agreed or strongly agreed that student test scores had improved since implementation of the freshman academy, a review of the school's data prior to and after implementation of the freshman academy showed a different trend. The first year after implementation, the scores for English I end-of-course tests increased but declined in 3 subsequent years. There was no substantial difference in the graduation rate and no increase in the attendance rate. These findings are not consistent with previous research by Pitts (2005) and Torres (2004) showing an increase in student performance and attendance.

4. What was the impact of the freshman academy on the key contributors including motivation, attitude toward school, and school culture?

Students' attitudes toward school, motivation, and the culture of the school play an integral role in student success. Worley (2007) defined student motivation as "a desire to engage in the learning process" (p. 46). Teachers conveyed that students are motivated in the freshman academy. Teachers noted student interaction with their peers with regard to learning as a way they see students engaged in the learning process. Students were engaged in their own learning by doing their assignments and participating in class; students assisted other students in their classes with assignments. Students, according to teachers as demonstrated in the interviews, encouraged each other to do well. Teachers commented that they aid in the motivation of students by using various instructional strategies. They indicated one of the biggest motivational strategies was the use of technology. Teachers discussed a banner with students' names on it hanging in the hallway of the freshman academy. According to teachers, the banner served as a catalyst for motivation, reminding students of their achievements.

In regard to student's attitudes, teachers shared through interview discussions that

students exhibited positive attitudes in the freshman academy. Teachers shared that students are seen in the hallways, “not moping about” and “not in fights every day.” Teachers also commented that students knew the teachers cared about them and were willing to help them. Murdock et al. (2000) maintained that it is important for students to have positive relationships with teachers and peers to keep students from feeling alienated and developing negative self images. Students with negative self images or who feel alienated may become disengaged from school. The teachers expressed that the students were taking ownership and some of the students offered to put articles in the freshman newsletter. Focus group II teachers agreed if students were not successful in one class, they could be switched to a different teacher who taught the same class, thereby giving the students a different environment to ensure success. Research by Nield et al. (2001) contended large high schools may offer a less personal environment, making it easier for students to become anonymous, socially withdrawn, and academically disengaged, which may further exacerbate a smooth transition from middle to high school.

The school’s culture adds to the motivation and attitude toward school. In this study, teachers shared during the interviews and from the teacher survey that students in the freshman academy knew what was expected of them; rules had been established for behavior. The teachers further expressed not only had the rules been set for the students in the academy, but the same rules would apply to the students when they left the academy. One teacher stated, “we set expectations for them every day so when they get to the 10th, 11th and 12th grade, the teachers don’t have to mold them.” Smith (2007) in the literature review supported this notion in referencing school culture. He maintained there are certain expectations communicated to students by teachers and the rules and

expectations represented the norms. Students understood school-wide expectations. Teachers expressed that students were participating in afterschool activities and joining clubs. Research by Smith-Mumford (2004) suggested that student activities are crucial for ninth graders to feel connected to their school.

An important component of the school's culture is the teachers and how they view themselves. The teachers in the freshman academy agreed that they liked working in the academy. The Teacher Perception Survey in this study supports the teachers' satisfaction with the freshman academy indicating 84% of the teachers liked working in the freshman academy. Teachers in both focus groups shared that they would not want to leave the academy because of the relationship they shared with the administrator. Focus group teachers perceived their roles as key, not only in instruction, but in establishing relationships with students. These findings are supported by Clark's (2007) research advocating a nurturing environment for students as they enter the ninth grade. Students in the freshman academy in this study were assigned an advisor to help cultivate the relationship between the teachers and students. Relationship emerged as a theme during discussions with central office personnel and both focus groups. The implications of having advisors can aid students with issues facing them as they encounter a new school environment. This supports research by Wasley and Lear (2001) noting that teachers can assist students in ways not typical in large high schools. Teachers in the freshman academy also conveyed during the interviews that they spent time collaborating and working together, attending monthly meetings, and being involved in team planning.

Conclusions

From the findings it can be summarized that while problems were identified by the district, the data did not point to conditions such as students' attitudes toward school,

motivation, and the school's culture as the rationale for implementing a freshman academy. The data also did not show the freshman academy impacted student performance. These findings are consistent with Fraker (2006), concluding there was no improvement in academic achievement for students in a freshman academy. The data further indicated there was no improvement in student attendance. Gary (2004) also found in his study that student attendance was not impacted by a freshman academy program. The findings also revealed there was no significant difference in the graduation rate for the students who participated in the freshman academy. These findings add to other studies regarding freshman academies.

As cited in the literature review, school districts across the nation are implementing strategies to address high school transition due to poor student achievement, poor student attendance, and low graduation rates. The school district in this study saw a need to address transition issues and did implement strategies to address high school transition. One of the strategies, because of the low student performance, low attendance rate, and low graduation rate at this high school, the district implemented a freshman academy. In addition to the freshman academy, the high school in this study provided freshman orientation for the incoming ninth graders. The findings disclosed that the freshman academy at the high school was being operated as designed. The students were isolated from the rest of the student population with one administrator and one guidance counselor and a team of teachers to assist students with problems that could occur during transition. Finally, students' motivations, students' attitudes toward school, and school culture were impacted by the freshman academy at the school in this study. Teachers spent time planning and collaborating; rules and expectations had been established for student behavior. Students were involved in extracurricular activities and

clubs, test scores were improving, attendance was unchanged, and the graduation rate increased.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was a case study examining one of the high schools in a district in North Carolina. The study data were comprised of data from archived documents, the administrators, and teachers of the school.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to schools with ninth-grade or freshman academies. The study was limited to student data for students who were in the ninth grade for the first time and were enrolled in end-of-course (EOC) classes. The study was further limited to the perceptions of teachers of ninth-grade or freshman academies.

Recommendations

Generally, the data from the interviews and survey indicated that the freshman academy impacted high school transition at the high school with regard to student achievement, the graduation rate, student attitudes, and motivation. There was, however, no impact on student attendance. Based on the data, the following recommendations are needed for continued success in those areas of the freshman academy:

1. The school district in this study should provide strategies to ensure all ninth graders in all of the high schools are involved in some type of transition program in order to compare student achievement, student attendance, and the graduation rate of all students. The research revealed the school district in this study implemented strategies for six of the eight high schools in the district. Since the transition to high school is a critical time in the lives of adolescents, it is important to ensure all students are receiving assistance with the transition process. Horwitz (2008) maintained that “even those

students who appear to be academically prepared for high school face considerable challenge during the 9th grade transition” (p. 2).

2. The school district in this study should educate all stakeholders at the school in this study about the freshman academy. The research showed all of the teachers did not know why there was a freshman academy at the high school. If programs are to be successful, all of those involved with execution of the program should be knowledgeable of the program. McDaniel (2008) maintained a key factor in the success of a program is the training of all stakeholders.

3. All teachers who teach in the freshman academy at the school in this study should have professional development specific to the freshman academy and the students. The research showed there was no professional development for teachers specific to the freshman academy. It is important that all teachers can design instruction and collaborate with peers in order to meet the specific needs of ninth graders and the curriculum they teach. Cook et al. (2008) suggested professional learning and collaboration provides teachers with insight, increases morale, and transcends the learning environment to benefit students.

4. The school or school district in this study should provide extensive transition activities throughout the school year. The research revealed this school only provided freshman orientation prior to the students beginning school. Providing extensive transition activities such as student report card conferences and success celebrations denoting student accomplishments would enhance and promote student success. Dedmond (2006) maintained that providing extensive and comprehensive activities would help students stay in school and reduce dropout rates.

5. The school or school district in this study should involve parents from the

school in this study in school activities. The research showed there was limited parental involvement. Parents play a vital role in the lives of students. Parental involvement, Mizelle (2005) maintained, is one of the key links to a student's academic achievement, attendance, attitude, and behavior. Parents who are involved during the transition to high school usually stay involved all through the high school years (Mizelle, 2005).

Recommendations for Future Research

As indicated in this study, the school district should include all first-time ninth graders in assisting with high school transition. The sustainability of a program is dependent upon knowledge of the program and professional development of those administering and executing the program. Queen (2002) noted that students who fail to graduate may experience lifelong problems. In that regard, the following suggestions are recommended:

1. Conduct a program evaluation of freshman academies in the same size district to determine their effectiveness in preventing high school dropout.
2. Study the professional development provided in other freshman academies in the school district in this study and the lack of professional development in freshman academies to compare the sustainability of the program.
3. Conduct a study of the students involved in freshman academies in the school district to track postsecondary activities.

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Appendix A
Survey Questions

Survey Questions

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement, with 1 being strongly agree (SA), 2 being agree (A), 3 being neutral (N), 4 being Disagree (D) and 5 being strongly disagree (SD)

1. Since the implementation of our academy, communication between teachers and students has been more positive.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Teachers like working in the Freshman Academy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

3. Teachers are encouraged to communicate concerns, questions, and constructive ideas.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

4. Teachers spend more time working together to develop and plan instruction.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

5. Teachers use various instructional strategies in the academy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

6. Students are encouraged to help others with problems.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

7. Teachers in the academy communicate expectations to students.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

8. Teachers in the Freshman Academy foster relationships with students.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

9. Teachers work together in trying to achieve goals.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

10. Teachers are involved in decision-making as it relates to the operation of the Freshman Academy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

11. Teachers do not participate enough in decision-making as it relates to the operation of the Freshman Academy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

12. Since the implementation of our academy, freshman grades have improved.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

13. Since the implementation of our academy, freshman test scores have improved.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

14. Since the implementation of our academy, student tardiness has improved.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

15. Since the implementation of our academy, student attendance has improved.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

16. Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

17. Since the implementation of our academy, student misbehavior does not interfere with teaching.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

18. Since the implementation of our academy, student behavior is positive.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

19. I would recommend a freshman academy to other schools.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

20. I believe freshman academies ease the transition from middle school to high school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Degree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B

Permissions to Conduct Research



Re: Permission to do research

Friday, February 13, 2009 1:22 PM

Sherry,

I will gladly allow you to conduct your research at XXX. I believe our Freshman Academy is developing into a model transition program for 9th grade students. Leadership in that Academy is provided by Mr. XXX. I have copied him on this response so that he will have some knowledge of your request. Please contact him regarding your visit(s).

I look forward to seeing you.

Principal

February 12, 2009
Principal
High School
XXX, North Carolina

I am a doctoral candidate at Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, NC. As an educator, specifically a former middle and high school teacher and administrator, transition concerns are of great interest to me. My study will address freshman academy and its impact on high school transition.

I am requesting permission to conduct my research at your school. My research will consist of interviewing and surveying teachers in the ninth grade academy at the high school. I would also like to interview you, the principal, the academy administrator and the ninth grade guidance counselor. The Assistant Superintendent has granted permission from the district and is supportive of my endeavor.

I am also requesting access to archival data with regards to student records, i.e. attendance, discipline referrals, and grades. All data collected and analyzed will be presented to the Gardner-Webb University excluding student and faculty names. A pseudonym will be used in the study in place of the actual school name.

I will be very happy and excited to discuss the findings from my study with you and your school. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely

Sherry Grier Veasey

Date: Wednesday, February 11, 2009, 2:01 PM

Sherry,

OK to conduct research as long as Mr. XXX grants permission. It was certainly good to talk with you. Thanks.

Assistant Superintendent
Secondary Schools

-----Original Message-----

From: Sherry Veasey [mailto:sherry_v_2000@yahoo.com]

Sent: Wednesday, July 02, 2008 8:48 AM

To: Allison Paige Potter (apotter)

Subject: Dissertation Instruments

July 2, 2008

Dear Dr. Potter,

I am a doctoral student at Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, North Carolina. I am quite interested in high school transition as it relates to student achievement, attendance and behaviors.

I have read your dissertation and I request permission to use and adapt the Ninth Grade Teacher Questionnaire as well as the Principal/Teacher Interview Guide as part of my study. I believe any information I ascertain will add to the body of research. I shall be happy to share any findings with you.

Sincerely,

Sherry Grier Veasey

Sherry,

Yes, you have my permission to adapt and use the surveys. Good luck on your research and let me know how it turns out.

Feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions about my work.

Allison

Allison Potter, Ph.D.
Business Officer
Sparks Bureau of Business and Economic Research
FEC 221
330 Innovation Drive
The University of Memphis
Memphis, TN 38152
901-678-4148
901-678-4086 (fax)
apotter@memphis.edu

Appendix C

Principal Interview Questions

Principal Interview Questions

Please provide a brief response to the following questions.

I. Principal Information

1. Are you the Freshman Academy Principal, head principal or both?
2. How long have you been the principal of this school?
3. What other educational experiences have you had?

II. School and Freshman Academy

4. Is your school a Title I school?
5. Is your academy only for low achieving ninth grade students?
6. Is your academy in a separate place on your campus?
7. Do teachers on the same teams have the same planning time?

III. Implementation

8. What was the rationale for implementing the freshman academy?
9. How were teachers selected to teach in the freshman academy?
10. How much professional development were teachers given for the freshman academy?
11. How much input did you receive from Central Office regarding the implementation?
12. What are the measurable goals for the freshman academy?

IV. Evaluation

15. Have the goals of the academy been met?
16. How do you monitor teachers in the Freshman Academy?

Appendix D

Questions for Central Office Personnel

Questions for Central Office Personnel

Please provide a brief response to the following questions.

1. What was the role of Central Office in the implementation of the freshman academy at the high school?
2. What support has the Central Office given to the school in regard to freshman academy?
3. Does the Central Office provide professional development for teachers in the freshman academy?

Appendix E
Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. How would you define the Freshman Academy?
2. Why is there a Freshman Academy at the high school?
3. What aspects of the Freshman Academy have you found most challenging?
4. What teaching techniques to you use to motivate students?
5. What is the overall impact of the Freshman Academy?

Appendix F

Telephone Interview with Principals

Telephone Interview with Principals

Interviewer: Tell me how you assist ninth graders with the transition to your school.

Principal # 1: We have a freshman orientation for upcoming ninth grade students. They come to school and we allow them to go through their schedules. It is an abbreviated schedule. They are divided into groups and taken on a tour of the school. Teachers are assigned to the students as advisors. These teachers meet with the students during homeroom on a regular basis to discuss materials from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*

Principal # 2: In addition to the day of orientation, we have a three hour summer camp for the upcoming ninth graders. They are involved character building activities, assigned an upperclassman mentor who assist them throughout their freshman year. They participate in scavenger hunts to familiarize themselves with the school and the school environment. They get a chance to meet their teachers and ask questions.

Principal #3: Our upcoming ninth graders participate in a three hour summer camp in addition to the regular orientation. They get a copy of their homeroom schedules and we talk to them about the life of ninth graders at the school. They are assigned an advocate.

Principal #4: We have a three hour summer camp for our ninth graders. They get an opportunity to tour the building and meet their other classmates. We talk to them about high school life. Prior to the first sporting event, the ninth graders and their parents are served dinner, schedules are handed out and information about the school is shared. (A)

Principal #5: In the past, we have had a summer camp for the ninth graders. They met their teachers, principal and received their class schedules. They also participated in a scavenger hunt. Now we go over to the middle school with the ninth grade counselor, meet with the students and give them registration information. We meet them again in

August with their parents and present information to them about the school and expectations in a power point during an assembly type program. The students are given information about study habits, test taking strategies and how to be successful in high school. They get their schedules and follow their schedules in an abbreviated time frame.

Principal #6: We don't have a camp for our freshmen. We do have a two hour orientation. The students and parents are invited to tour the building, meet the teachers, counselor and administrator.

Appendix G
Survey Frequency Tables

Survey Frequency Tables

Q1

Since the implementation of our academy, communication between teachers and students has been more positive.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	6	46.2	46.2	46.2
Agree	4	30.8	30.8	76.9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	23.1	23.1	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q2

Teachers spend more time working together to develop and plan instruction.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	6	46.2	46.2	46.2
Agree	5	38.5	38.5	84.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	92.3
Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q3

Teachers are encouraged to communicate concerns, questions and constructive ideas.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	8	61.5	61.5	61.5
Agree	5	38.5	38.5	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q4

Teachers like working in the Freshman Academy.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	6	46.2	46.2	46.2
Agree	5	38.5	38.5	84.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2	15.4	15.4	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q5**Students are encouraged to help others with problems.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	1	7.7	7.7	7.7
Agree	7	53.8	53.8	61.5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	4	30.8	30.8	92.3
Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q6**Teachers in the academy communicate expectations to students.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	6	46.2	46.2	46.2
Agree	7	53.8	53.8	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q7**Teachers use various instructional strategies in the academy.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	7	53.8	53.8	53.8
Agree	6	46.2	46.2	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q8**Teachers in the freshman academy foster relationships with students.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	7	53.8	53.8	53.8
Agree	5	38.5	38.5	92.3
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q9

Teachers are involved in decision-making as it relates to the operation of the freshman academy.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	6	46.2	46.2	46.2
Agree	6	46.2	46.2	92.3
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q10

Teachers work together in trying to achieve goals.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	5	38.5	38.5	38.5
Agree	8	61.5	61.5	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q11

Teachers do not participate enough in decision-making as it relates to the operation of the freshman academy.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	7.7
Disagree	9	69.2	69.2	76.9
Strongly Disagree	3	23.1	23.1	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q12

Since the implementation of our academy, freshman test scores have improved.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	3	23.1	23.1	23.1
Agree	6	46.2	46.2	69.2
Neither Agree nor Disagree	4	30.8	30.8	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q13

Since the implementation of our academy, student tardiness has improved.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	2	15.4	15.4	15.4
Agree	5	38.5	38.5	53.8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5	38.5	38.5	92.3
Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q14

Since the implementation of our academy, freshman grades have improved.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	1	7.7	7.7	7.7
Agree	7	53.8	53.8	61.5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5	38.5	38.5	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q15

Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	1	7.7	7.7	7.7
Agree	9	69.2	69.2	76.9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	23.1	23.1	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q16

Since the implementation of our academy, student misbehavior does not interfere with teaching.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	2	15.4	15.4	15.4
Neither Agree nor Disagree	8	61.5	61.5	76.9
Disagree	3	23.1	23.1	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q17**Since the implementation of our academy, student behavior is positive.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	9	69.2	69.2	69.2
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	23.1	23.1	92.3
Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q18**Since the implementation of our academy, student attendance has improved.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	6	46.2	46.2	46.2
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6	46.2	46.2	92.3
Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q19**I would recommend a freshman academy to other schools.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	6	46.2	46.2	46.2
Agree	5	38.5	38.5	84.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	92.3
Strongly Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	

Q20**I believe freshman academies ease the transition from middle school to high school.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	7	53.8	53.8	53.8
Agree	5	38.5	38.5	92.3
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	13	100.0	100.0	